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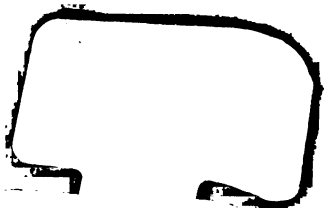
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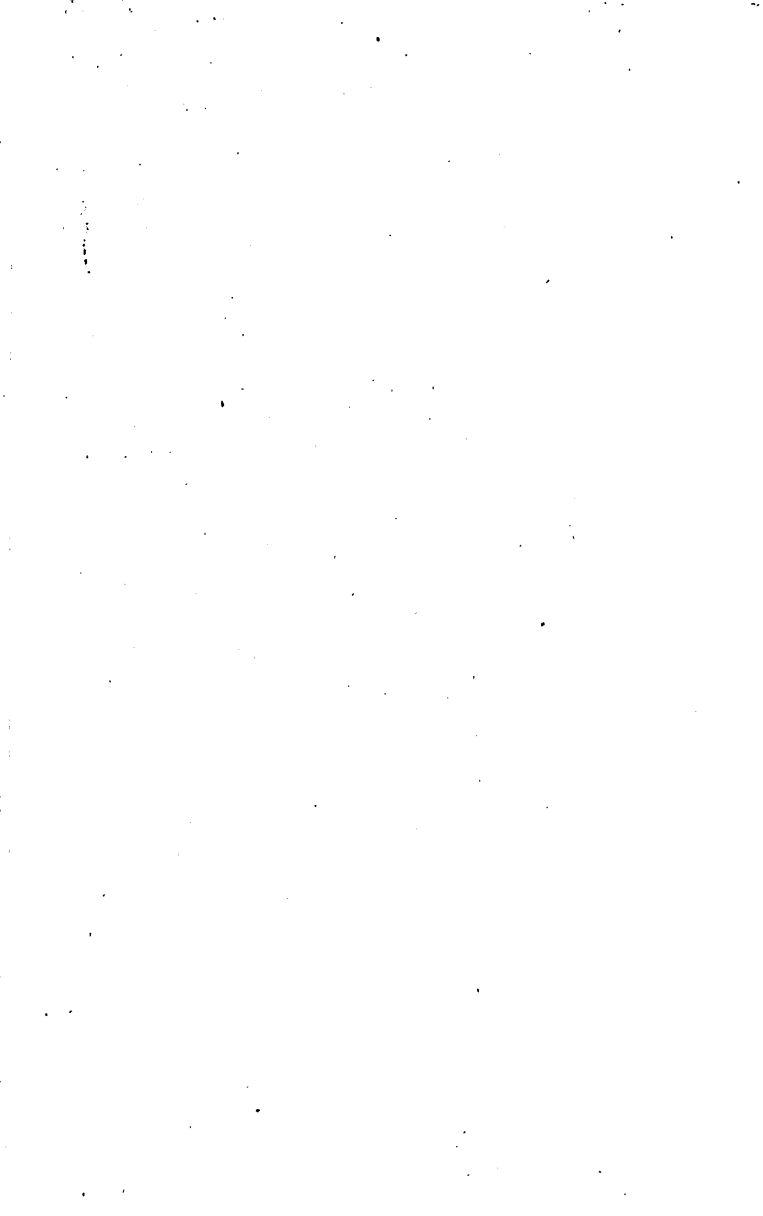
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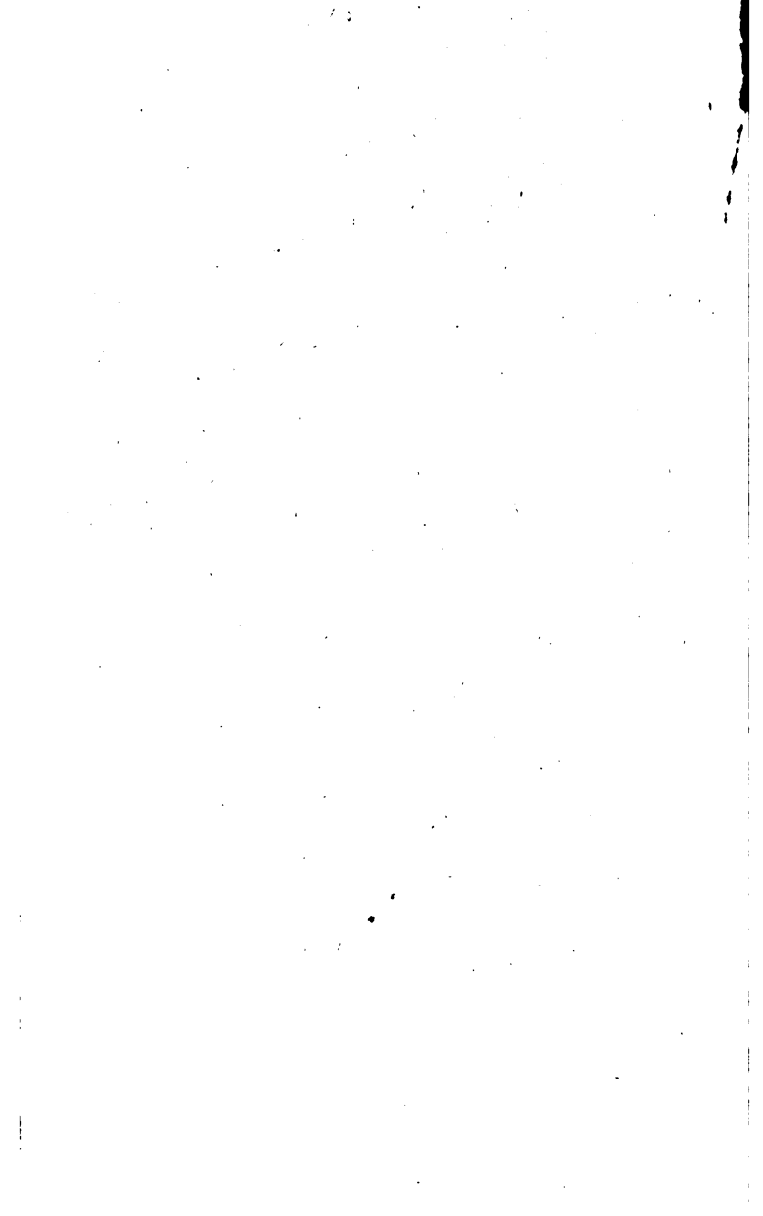
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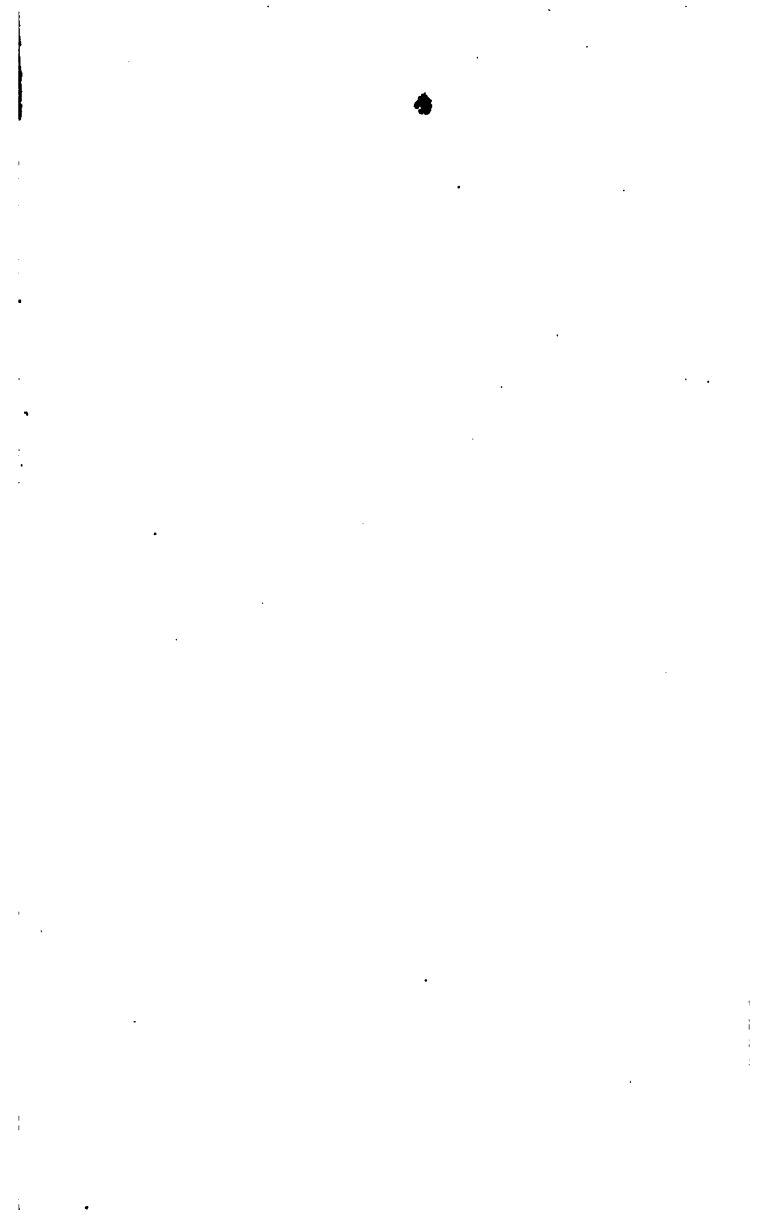


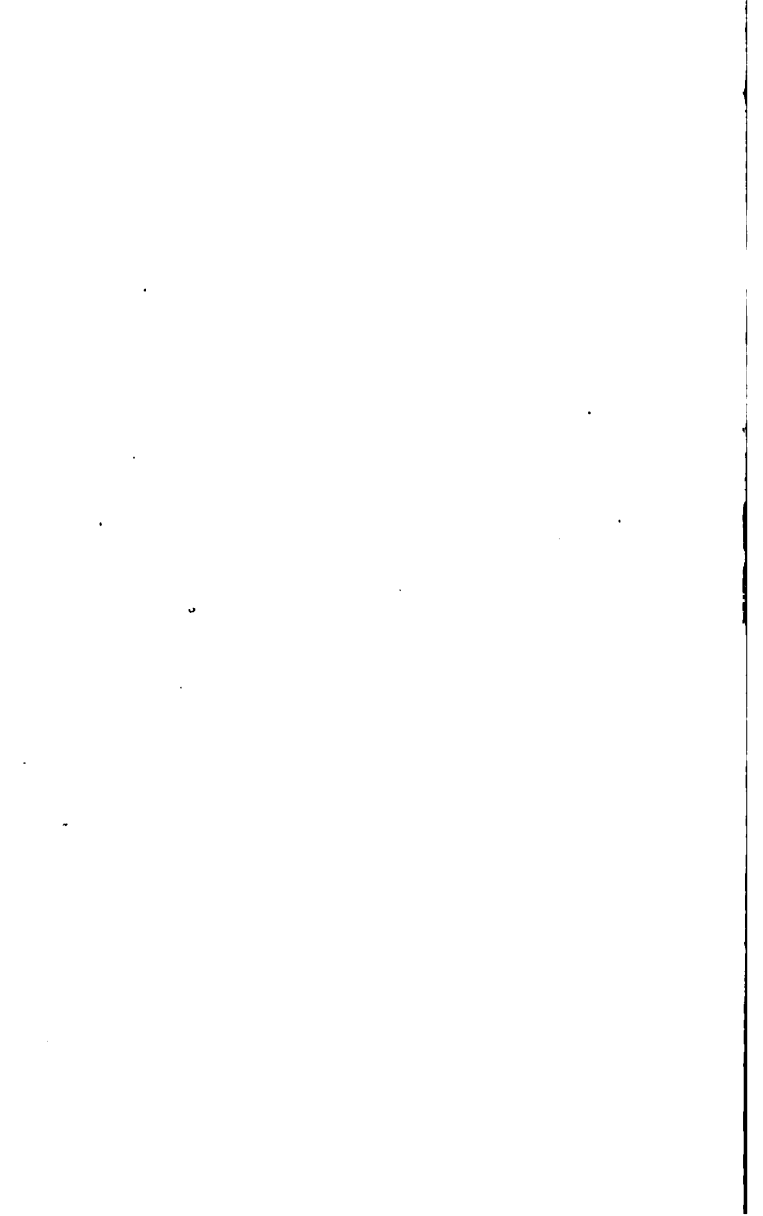
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A Tale

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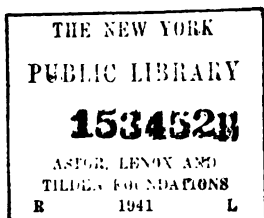
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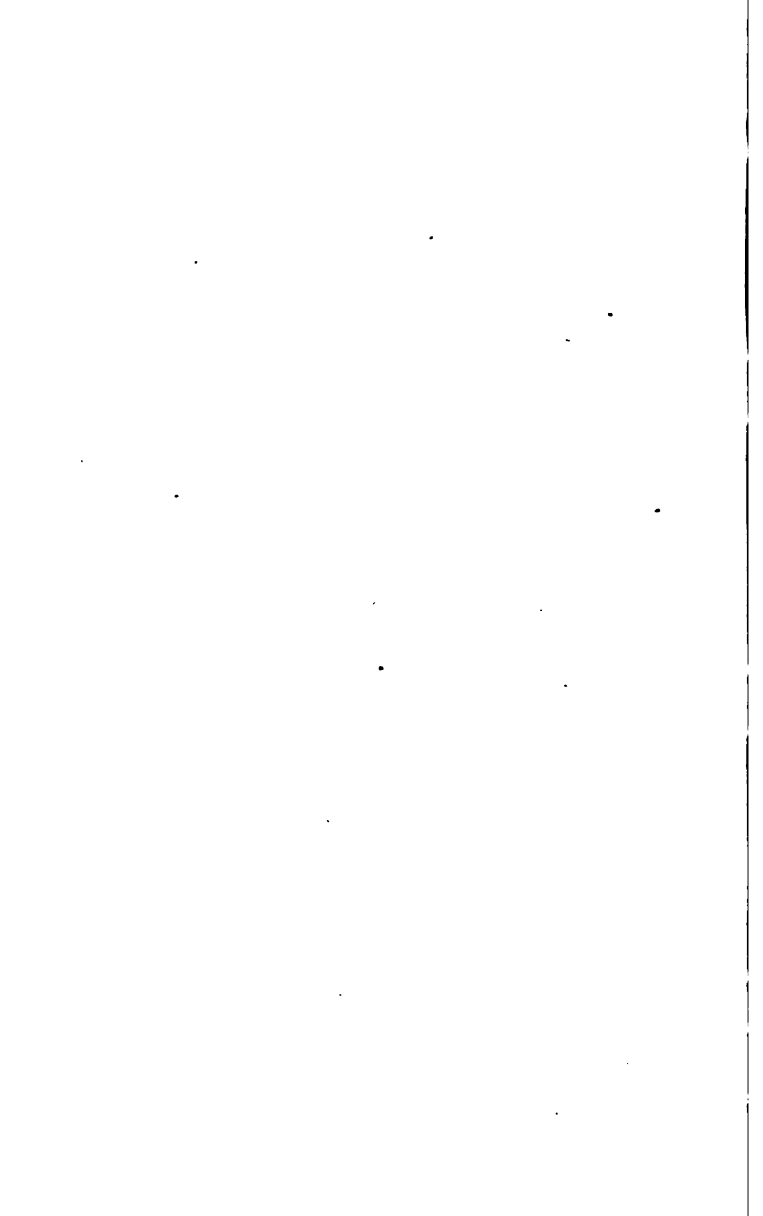
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OCT 1 1913

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To my Wife.

Run 35



CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. AT "THE MUSHROOMS"	I
II. THE "AFFINITY LINE"	24
III. JEREMIAH	42
IV. WOODBINE COTTAGE	56
V. "TINKER" AND THE "TADPOLE"	76
VI. THE BURGLARY	93
VII. AT BRIGHTON	109
VIII. THE TRAGEDY	123
IX. THE CONFESSION	134

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CHAPTER I.

AT "THE MUSHROOMS."

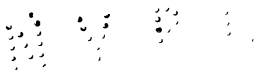
"I AM thinking," said Mr. Theodore MacStodger, looking up from his bacon, "of running up to town to see Frisby about that lease."

"And let us go to Sir John's alone, you appear to forget the garden-party is fixed for to-day."

"True, it *had* slipped my memory, to-morrow will do equally well for Frisby. I shall go by the early train and make a day of it, I think."

He paused and seeing that for some reason his wife did not raise her usual objections to his London trips, took advantage of her silence and the implied acquiescence, "in fact, I may stay the night."

"Why?"



This word was shot over the coffee-pot. Mrs. MacStodger believed in brevity. She had been heard to boast to some of her more intimate friends that she could invariably give Theodore seventy-five words out of a hundred and beat him easily.

Her husband was ready for her this time, however, with an answer that he knew would please her.

"The fact is, my dear, it has struck me that we do not give half enough time to Charlie. He will suffer from the neglect. Home-influence is everything to a high-spirited boy like ours. What is the good of our filling his rooms with knick-knacks from home, if we ourselves keep away from him. There are many temptations in London, Charlotte, and it is hardly right to expose Charlie to them, I remember when I was studying—"

"Yes, yes, you've told me before," put in his wife testily, effectually stopping Theodore's reminiscences. It was

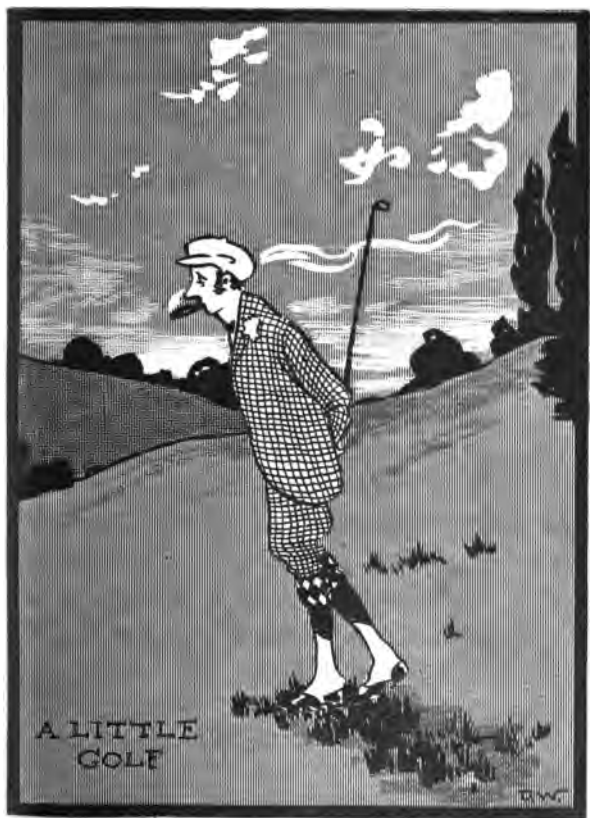
a pleasing fiction of MacStodger's, those days of study. The plain truth was known to all, even himself, that he had never done a day's real work in his life. People did not blame him for this, they gave him the benefit of the doubt, saying that if his path through life had been less easy, he would have acted differently. As it was, he inherited "The Mushrooms" and a tidy rent-roll before he even had time to more than look round his rooms in the Temple, and, with this competence, the vague idea he had had of rising to be a K.C., left him for ever.

We find him now a neat and dapper little man of about forty-five to fifty, very unassuming, having few opinions and expressing none. He has no politics or ideas to speak of, but was once a passive resister for three months and a vegetarian for two. He is fond of sport, (as a spectator) and plays a little golf. He vamps at the piano and has been known to bring off the spot stroke ten

times in succession. His one absorbing hobby, however, is roses, his rosery all but equalling that of his neighbour, Sir John Callendar of Callendar Castle, whose blooms are the talk and envy of the county.

Enough has been said to show that our hero has few attainments to boast of, but then he has few faults. His life is a placid one and he is well content.

As he appears, this peaceful July morning, it is hard to feel anything but envy for his sunny existence. He has on a suit of light grey, very light, his linen and waistcoat are spotless, while a tiny pink tie gives quite a flower-like look to the little man. Rumour has it that he is somewhat governed by his wife and judging by appearances, rumour can readily be believed. Charlotte MacStodger is of a type that is generally described as "of ample dimensions." Slightly younger than her husband, she looks more than slightly older. She has a sure knowledge of her power over



him and is careful not to abuse it, but his little trips to town are not looked

upon with any great favour by her. There was a story, years ago, of a battle royal between them on account of one of these visits being unduly protracted. The counter-foil in a cheque-book and a scented pocket handkerchief figured in this scandal, since when Theodore's best excuses have sounded lame to him, and lamer still to her.

This morning he is spared a discussion by the entrance of a servant with the morning papers, which do not reach "The Mushrooms" till about nine o'clock, and a little trouble in the kitchen demanding the attention of his wife he is left in peace. Lighting a cigar he drops into a comfortable chair and opens the "Telegraph." He glances at the weather report, the racing, the city column and settles down to the leader. It is not very interesting this morning, navy-estimates do not appeal to him, and he is soon out among his beloved roses, scissors in hand, a wide Panama shading his face.

"Hallo!"

"Bless my heart, how you startled me, Harry," and running down the path Theodore opened the little gate that gives on to the lane.

Harry Callendar propped his machine against the hedge and taking the open gate as an invitation walked in. He held in his hand a small cardboard box from which he removed the lid as he came up the path.

"The gov'nor would never forgive me if he knew," he said, "but I simply could not resist picking you one each as I came through the rosery," and he held the open box before Theodore's delighted eyes, eyes that fairly sparkled with appreciation as they took in the glories of the treasures nestling within.

"Sir John certainly never would forgive you," he said seriously, taking up a beautiful yellow blossom surrounded by a brown foliage, "perhaps you are unaware that these are the '*Etoile de Lyon*,' your father only has one tree

of them. He was only telling me with pride yesterday that he had three buds nearly out, he will be looking for them by now and blame the gardener."

"Or the green-flies," laughed Harry, "I'm sorry for the guv'nor, but I'm glad these are good ones, that one is for Lucy, is she about?"

The query needed no verbal answer, as turning a bend in the shrubbery, the men came upon the kitchen garden in which the 'young lady in question was busily engaged in picking the necessary vegetables for the day's cooking. Very pretty she looked, too, and fresh, in her cool sun-bonnet and holland overall. Her little hand, encased in a neat gardening glove, grasped a bunch of freshly pulled carrots, their glorious colour adding a charming touch to the picture. Harry, at all events, thought the sight delightful and was saying so when Theodore left them together. The stable clock striking eleven reminded him that it was time for his morning trip into the



little town of Bamford. A groom was ready at the gate with his bicycle and Theodore was soon speeding merrily over the two miles that separated the town from "The Mushrooms."

As he pedalled along he thought of the two young people he had just left, and of what a good match it was for Lucy. She had been engaged to Harry for six months and the wedding was now freely spoken of as being at no very distant date. Charlotte was at one with him in his satisfaction, and the apt introduction of the mutually joyful topic had saved many a discussion that threatened to exceed the bounds of pleasant conversation.

Bamford was a delightful little county town and in the dancing sunlight of this perfect morning it appeared more delightful than ever. The High Street was built on a hill and as one entered at the top end of the town the prospect was indeed a striking one. Irregular houses with the quaintest of bow windows

were on either hand, making one long straggling street leading down to the bridge which spanned the river at the foot of the town. Beyond this valley rose hills, the pasture, corn lands and different crops marking a curious chess-board pattern on the hill side. It was market-day and Theodore was kept busy nodding to acquaintances as he carefully threaded his way through the mass of governess-cars and carriers' vans, which seemed to compose the bulk of the vehicular traffic of Bamford. He alighted at the steps of a pretty little building opposite the town-clock and gave his machine into the care of a commissionaire stationed at the door.

The County Club of Bamshire was very exclusive and very comfortable, and as Theodore walked into the cosy smoking-room on the first floor, the bow-windows of which took in every corner of the High Street, it was easy to see that he was a popular member. Everybody seemed to like the little man

and after sundry greetings he found himself in a comfortable chair *vis-a-vis* with his particular crony, one Colonel Montgeyer, and prepared to enjoy his morning.

He could never quite tell afterwards what turned the conversation into the deep currents of occult science. He thinks it was a portrait in the "Sketch" of a celebrated palmist, Madame Cleo, who was apparently turning the heads of half London at the time. He remembers being very surprised at the view the Colonel took of the matter. Whether it was his stay in India with his regiment that had influenced the old soldier or no, he was not prepared to say, but the fact remained that nothing could shake Colonel Montgeyer's belief in palmistry, clairvoyance and their kindred sciences.

"This very woman," he went on after expressing his convictions, and pointing to the portrait with his cigar, "has told me most wonderful things, true in every detail, I certainly do not like it to be

known that I consult these people, but many of my actions through life have been guided by the wonderful science and knowledge they appear to possess. You will look, therefore, upon what I have told you as being in strict confidence."

Theodore nodded and took a pull at his whisky and seltzer and the talk soon after drifted into other channels.

He, nevertheless, did not fail to take a note of the address of this wonderful person and when he left the club his pocket book contained the following entry,

Madame Cleo,
112a, Mills Street,
Oxford Street, W.

He hoped the Colonel had not seen him write it down, for it had occurred to Theodore to consult this seer at the first opportunity and in the meantime

he did not intend to mention the matter to a soul. In his own mind he was even a little ashamed at his decision. He could not help thinking at lunch how Harry would laugh at him, and as for Charlotte, well—no, he did not think *she* would laugh. Taken altogether he deemed it wise to keep the matter to himself.

That it had taken a strong hold on his mind could not be doubted. At the garden-party Sir John could make nothing of him, although he tried hard to raise an argument on one of their pet topics. They generally had a wordy war over their roses when they met, "battles of flowers," Harry called them, but this afternoon Theodore absent-mindedly agreed to all the Baronet said, much to the latter's disgust. It was remarked, however, that the little man gave a great deal of his time to an acquaintance of his wife's, Miss Agatha Blarm by name, who was generally voted a bore of the first water. She

was an ancient spinster, who, after abandoning all hope of matrimony had beaten around for some hobby to give her an interest in life, spiritualism being her final choice, and whilst the seances that she held at "Ramayana," her pretty little cottage in the village, were still fairly well attended, Bamshire society was hardly as enthusiastic as formerly.

She was looking very *intense* as she sat with Theodore under a beautiful lime tree facing the principal marquee. A gown of green silk hung on, rather than fitted, her spare figure whilst a heavy metal belt studded with barbaric gems supported an immense chatelaine crowded with all manner of strange and curious things. A little ivory talisman from the East jingled against a *cochon* which was credited with wonderful powers at Monte Carlo, a little jade image of Indra jostled a piece of stone from a Thibet temple, seals and keys there were in profusion and the little black

object was said to be a portion of dried toad, the reptile in question having, previous to his appearance at Miss Blarm's waist, spent a blameless but sedentary existence of some thousand years or more in a piece of rock. Agatha Blarm was by no means an unattractive old lady, her hair was snow white and her healthy complexion certainly gave the lie to those gossips who were fond of asserting that her diet was composed entirely of whole-meal bread and nuts. It is perhaps superfluous to add that this lady was responsible for Theodore's periods of vegetarianism and passive resistance.

This afternoon she had been treating him to a lengthy lecture on the benefits to be derived from sun-baths and sandals, and it was with no little difficulty that he had, at length, brought the conversation round to palmistry.

"Do you really think, my dear Miss Blarm," he queried, "that there is anything in it? I have heard so much

lately that I really begin to think that it cannot all be a hoax."

Agatha Blarm thought for a moment.

"I had an uncle," she said, "who practised the art, merely as an amateur, of course, and he certainly told me some most wonderful things about myself, things that came true in most details. He has been dead for some years now, but his shade often appears at my *séances*. I will ask him about it next time he materializes if you like."

Theodore bowed, "You are too kind," he said.

"Poor uncle," Miss Blarm went on after a pause, "he did not lead a very good life on earth, I'm afraid. He tells me he is suffering for it now. But," in a burst of enthusiasm, "it must be very interesting, don't you think, to be a lost soul?"

"I should think it was very uncomfortable," put in Charlotte in a matter of fact voice. She had approached them unperceived. "We are just going, Theo-

IT MUST BE VERY INTERESTING
TO BE A LOST SOUL *



dore, can we drop you at 'Ramayana,' Miss Blarm? It is all on our way."

But Agatha was very comfortable where she was, so the MacStodgers joined Lucy, where she was bidding good-bye to Harry and entered their carriage.

A letter from their son awaited them on their arrival at "The Mushrooms." Theodore looked grave as he felt the bulky envelope. Charlie's epistles were

generally short and to the point, their purport invariably pecuniary assistance. His father adjusted his gold-rimmed spectacles and opened the letter.

"Guy's Hospital,
Tuesday,

"My dear Parents, (Charlie wrote),

"Many thanks for your remittance, it was, as usual, timely, I might even say, more than usually welcome. I have an unbidden guest in my chambers at the present time, a friend of the Mr. Isaacs, who, you will remember, has that little bill of mine. My visitor is, in short, a *man in possession*, the usual low type. His trade has coarsened him I suppose, still, with the help of some of my clothes and by addressing him as 'Colonel,' my callers have so far pretended not to pierce the deception. With your honoured remittance I hoped to clear him off the premises, the few extra necessary pounds I raised on my watch. After leaving 'Uncle's,' I had the misfortune to run against two of

Bart's men and we visited the 'Alhambra' to see the new ballet. When I returned to Fleet Buildings, the man had not gone to bed, in fact I fell over his prostrate body at the foot of the stairs. An empty whisky decanter and a few beer bottles told the sad tale, but worse was to come. The infernal idiot had managed to break his leg in two places. The doctor says he is not to be moved for a month at least. Mrs. Batt, my landlady you know, helped me to put him to bed, —my bed. She says she heard the sound of a heavy body falling downstairs and then groans, but as she was reading the 'Police Terror' at the time she was too scared to go and see what was the matter. Now, pater, what is to be done? Run up and see me and let's talk the matter over. I enclose the ticket for the watch,

“ And remain, as ever,

“ Your devoted son,

“ CHARLIE.”



VISITED
THE
'ALHAMBRA'

Theodore pushed the letter over to his wife, and sat twirling Attenborough's little square of pasteboard in his fingers, lost in thought. When he was quite sure Charlotte's eyes were on the letter, he smiled. He wished he had not mentioned Frisby and the lease, it was imperative that he went to town now and Frisby was far too good an excuse to be lightly thrown away, it would have done for another day.

His wife took Charlie's letter very seriously, she even suggested that her husband caught the late up-train that night to see the boy, but this did not suit Theodore's book at all. With care this trip ought to last two or three days and he did not intend to be bundled off without a carefully arranged programme. He spent some time that evening at his desk, writing letters and making out a substantial cheque to "Self."

Charlotte had seen to the packing of his "Gladstone" herself.

"I did not put your dress-suit in," she told him when he went upstairs, "it takes up the room and you won't need it."

"No, dear, I won't need it," he said.

There was another dress-suit comfortably resting with a knob of camphor, in a cardboard-box at Charlie's, but of course Charlotte knew nothing of that.

CHAPTER II.

THE "AFFINITY LINE."

THEODORE parted the little green curtains that hung at the window of his dressing-room and peeped through. There had been no rain, on the trim lawn two blackbirds were disputing the possession of a particularly fat and early worm. He looked across to where the vane on the stables glittered in the morning sunlight—yes, the wind was right. Gaily whistling a bar or two of "Hiawatha" he proceeded with his shaving.

His train went at ten and at twenty minutes past nine he was at the front entrance of "The Mushrooms" awaiting the dog-cart. He looked very "natty" in his grey frock-coat in which was pinned a *Gloire de Dijon*. His hat was of the glossiest, and the hand that rested on his daughter's shoulder was immaculate in its casing of grey Suède.

"The boy is all right, dear," he was saying, "I'll give him your love and perhaps bring him back with me—good-bye, good-bye, Charlotte," turning to his wife. "What's that?"

She was holding out an ugly looking parcel towards him.

"For Charlie," she said, "only a dozen eggs and two pounds of butter from the dairy, and I put in some home-made cakes and a pot or two of jam as well, the dear boy!"

Theodore looked first at the parcel then at his gloves. The whitey brown paper already showed some horrid little patches of grease from the butter, and he would have protested, but at that moment the cart driving up, the package was duly placed on the rubber mat at his feet.

"Will you pass the Cottage Hospital on your way back, this morning, John?" asked Theodore as he was driven along.

"I can, sir."

"There is a little parcel here that



your mistress wishes you to leave there, some eggs and things I think. It must be dreadful to be ill this fine weather, we should do all we can for them, John."

"Yessir," from the coachman, his face turned to the "off."

"I may be away a few days, you must give a look to the roses, John, I hardly trust my new gardener yet."

"Yessir."

"And, John, you need not say anything about the parcel for the hospital. 'Do good by stealth' you know, John. And, here's half-a-sovereign, John. I hold you responsible for the roses."

"Yessir."

"Good-morning, John."

"Good-morning, Sir."

He caught his train comfortably (Theodore always did things comfortably) and during the seventy minutes' run to the metropolis he gave himself up to pleasant anticipations of his little holiday. He would get Charlie out of his scrape at once and he would then feel free. On arriving at Paddington he hailed a hansom and after leaving his bag at the Cecil proceeded on foot to Fleet Buildings.

Mr. MacStodger, junior, was out, Mrs. Batt told him, but he might be in at any moment, would he wait? It seemed the best thing to do and Theodore, knowing the way, mounted the stairs to Charlie's sitting-room, having first re-

ceived the key from the old lady. He pulled a chair up to the open window and settled himself down to wait as patiently as he could. The hum of London life came through the window and unsettled him, however, and he started on a tour of the room. It was a cosy apartment, light and airy and very comfortably furnished. There was a good deal of cigar ash scattered about on the carpet and the open windows had not yet had the effect of quite dispelling the odour of stale spirits that hung about the curtains. Although there were plenty of books visible there was little evidence of "reading." The imposing rows of medical works in their sombre bindings were suspiciously new and seemed to frown from their shelves at the sights they were too often called upon to witness. After a diligent search through the cupboards Theodore found what he wanted and mixed himself a pretty stiff one.

He felt better after this, and still less

inclined than ever to waste his morning in the little room. He rang the bell.

"I am going out to have some lunch, Mrs. Batt," he said, "I would like to see the invalid, however, where is he?"

The landlady led the way to Charlie's bedroom. It was a pitiful sight that met Theodore's gaze, the poor bailiff was propped up in the bed, the picture of misery. His face was white with pain, throwing into strong relief the purple patches of a mis-spent life, which refused to blanch. He seemed very weak and could not speak above a whisper. He was very anxious to explain that he had fallen over a coal-scuttle carelessly left on the stairs, but physical weakness and the indignant look on Mrs. Batt's face made the effort too much for him and he closed his eyes. Theodore could do no good there and then and he left the patient with a few consoling words and accompanied the landlady downstairs.

"Where does Mr. MacStodger sleep since the accident?" he asked.

"He has been reading late he tells me, sir," Mrs. Batt made reply, "with a friend—so he does not come home at night since the broker's gentleman has had his room."

Theodore thought it unwise to pursue the subject further, but made a mental note that Charlie should give him an explanation later.

Then he drove to Frascati's and lunched.

He has since said that it was fate that drew him down Oxford Street after his meal, that it was fate that made him raise his eyes and catch sight of the name Mills Street on a corner house. Unconsciously he gave a furtive glance to right and left, then boldly turned the corner and knocked at the door of No. 11A.

It was a smart-looking house, the windows curtained with green silk and the door picked out in a lighter shade of the same colour. There was a certain air about the place, half professional and

half rakish, as though it might be the residence of a divorce-court barrister. Theodore had little time, however, to ruminate on the appearance of the house, as the door was immediately opened by a servant in a gorgeous livery of dull red piped with silver. To this man he tendered his card with the enquiry if Madame Cleo was at home.

She was, and the servant, closing the door, led the way to the waiting-room. Theodore was relieved to see that the few people already there were strangers to him. These, in turn, were called into the presence of the clairvoyante and at last Theodore became aware of the attendant holding aside a heavy purple curtain for his admission.

The sanctum of Madame Cleo was a curious admixture of the Orient and Tottenham Court Road, the former supplying the decoration, the latter the solid comfort. There were hangings, carpets, rugs, vases, kakemonas and miscellaneous ornaments from the East,

commodious chairs and couches from Maple's. Drawn up to one of the windows facing Mills Street was a large square table on which the implements of the seer's trade were lying in an "admired disorder." Theodore noticed several



crystals of various sizes, innumerable bottles containing fluids of different colours, books, herbs, little boxes and porcelain jars, whilst from an ebony stand a skull grinned horribly at him.

Facing this table was a glass case of manicure sets and pomades. On the grey green walls a set of Hogarth's "Rake's Progress" showed to advantage. A large easel, drawn up to face the light, supported a chart of the palm of a hand, and Theodore was in the act of examining this when he became aware that someone had entered the room.

Madame Cleo was old—over seventy he thought—and but for her eyes she would have appeared commonplace. Wonderful eyes they were that searched one through and through. She was attired in a robe of some dark material with little silver stars peppered round the hem and throat, her waist was encircled with a turquoise studded belt. Her voice was a tuneful one with a hardly perceptible foreign accent. She looked from Theodore to the chart and back again.

"Palmistry?" she queried.

"I hardly know," said Theodore feebly.

"Perhaps a general survey of past,

present and future? Pray be seated."

Theodore sank into the chair indicated while Madame Cleo took one opposite to him. He was by this time beginning to lose some of his nervousness and was able to state more clearly the reason of his visit.

"There is nothing in particular that I wish to consult you about," he said, "but finding myself in the neighbourhood, I—I remembered your name. A friend of mine—a Colonel—was speaking to me recently about you. He told me of your wonderful powers and I must confess that a desire to see you rather than to enquire into the future brought me here—vulgar curiosity, in fact," he added with a nervous laugh.

While he had been speaking he had let Cleo take his left hand in both of hers and the palmist was now examining it narrowly. Her brow was puckered with much thought and she looked so serious that Theodore half wished he had not called.



Her first words, however, reassured him.

"Your lines are cast in very pleasant places," she observed, "but there is

a little line here that I cannot for the moment account for—stay—let me see your right.”

Another close examination followed when suddenly the clairvoyante rose and rang a small hand-bell.

The servant entered and stood at attention.

“Volume four—year 1874.”

“Yes, madame.”

The attendant retired, to re-appear in a few moments with a large folio bound in red leather, on which were tooled in gold the signs of the Zodiac.

His mistress took the book to the light and with fingers that trembled with suppressed excitement turned up, first the index and then a page near the end of the volume. A short survey of the entry there sufficed her and returning to her seat she again took Theodore's hand.

“In all my long professional career,” she began, “I have never met with an instance such as I am about to relate to

you. I have discovered the meaning of this little line. To be brief, it is the *affinity line* that is met with so seldom. It shows that somewhere in the world there is a man, whose life is bound up with yours in a most mystic manner. The little line is on the hand of that man as well as on yours—I think I am right in saying that you were born on May 16th, 1856."

Theodore's heart seemed to stop as he acknowledged the accuracy of the statement.

"At three in the morning?"

Theodore did not remember, but said he shouldn't wonder.

The palmist crossed the room and taking up the book open at the page she had previously examined, she placed it before him, her index finger on the entry. Theodore put on his spectacles and read.

"November 7th, 1874.

Jeremiah Wopple."

Born May 16th, 1856, 3 a.m.

Then followed a long account of the

said Jeremiah's hand, and Theodore noticed that the words "affinity line" were underscored with red ink.

Madame Cleo went on, "When this man came to me in 1874, I for the first time set eyes on the wonderful *affinity line* and of course took copious notes of such an interesting case. That I should come across you, I can only look upon as the workings of fate. I have seen nothing of Jeremiah Wopple since that day, thirty years ago."

"Perhaps he is dead," suggested Theodore.

Madame Cleo smiled. "No," she answered, "were that the case you would not be here, when he dies, you die. It is an immutable law that two persons bearing the same *affinity line* are not only born at the same moment, but they also depart this life simultaneously. This is, of course, of no interest to either of you so long as you are apart, but fate having worked so well hitherto in this matter, it is only reasonable to

surmise that you will be brought together. I will consult the crystal to-night and if you will call to-morrow, I may be able to tell you something fresh."

Theodore promised and took his departure. He would sleep on the matter and he left it open in his own mind whether he would drop the whole affair or go through with it. His first thought on leaving the house of mystery was that it was all humbug, his second, that he would take a drink. Over his whisky he ruminated and thought deeply. Cleo's precision in telling him the exact hour of his birth had left a deep impression on him. Could the Colonel, suspecting his intentions, have prepared her, as a joke? On consideration, however, he did not think Montgeyer himself knew the date. Then also, Jeremiah's entry was yellow with age and certainly had not the appearance of being faked.

As he walked through the streets, it came upon him that this infernal business was going to worry him. He saw a

man, apparently of his own age, being conveyed to the hospital in a hansom. It was a bad accident. Suppose that man was Jeremiah. Again, suppose Jeremiah was a steeple-jack, or employed in a dynamite factory, or any trade or occupation equally dangerous. He would find this man, the suspense was too terrible. Hailing a cab he told the man to drive to Fleet Buildings. As they crossed Cambridge Circus the cab stopped dead and a crowd gathered. The driver was in a fit. Theodore alighted and waited till the man came round, he listened eagerly while a policeman took the poor fellow's name. Thank goodness it was not Jeremiah, and Theodore continued his journey on foot. He must pull himself together. At the "Chandos" he had another whisky and felt braver. No, he would tell nobody. What was to be, was to be, there was an end of the matter. But he wished Madame Cleo at the bottom of the ocean, she had spoiled his holiday.

He arrived at Charlie's rooms, where his son, scenting a good dinner with the pater, was anxiously awaiting him already dressed for the evening. Theodore soon followed suit and the two men prepared to start.

"How's the old boy upstairs, Charlie?"

"About the same, his medicine's just come," and Charlie ran downstairs to call a cab.

Theodore felt more himself now, and was engaged in fixing his tie in the mirror over the mantelpiece, when Charlie went out. From the mirror he looked at the clock and found it was half-past eight. His eyes then travelled along the mantelshelf and rested on the medicine. He just had time to read the directions on the chemist's label before he fainted.

The Mixture.

To be taken three times a day,

Mr. Jeremiah Wepple.

CHAPTER III.

JEREMIAH.

SLOWLY they brought the unconscious Theodore to himself and he dodged the third bowl of water that the kindly hand of Mrs. Batt was directing at his brow with the unerring aim that had characterized the two previous pints. Those had done the work of restoration, but at the same time, sorely bedraggled his clothes. His immaculate shirt was a poor thing indeed after the landlady had done with it, and with his disordered neck-gear he presented a very wretched contrast to the Theodore of a short half-hour ago.

"Why all this fuss, Mrs. Batt," he cried shaking the drips from his face, then he added superfluously, "where am I?"

Traditions die hard and the query seemed to him a perfectly rational and sane one. No one, however, appeared to think it at all necessary to answer him except Mrs. Batt.

She murmured "With friends."

The good lady remembered having heard the same query replied to in those words at the Adelphi after a hero had triumphantly emerged from a severe fit.

"Where's Charlie? Ah, come here, my boy."

The young man approached his father.

"How is he?" This in a hoarse whisper from Theodore.

"Who?"

"Him," pointing to the ceiling.

"Oh, old Jerry — suppose he's all right, he was asleep a while ago."

"The medicine I spilled, have you sent to have it replaced?"

"Not much, pater, I don't think the old boy ever *does* take the stuff, throws it away."

"But, Charlie," Theodore rose up and gripped his son's arm, "he mustn't do that, it may retard his recovery, it may be most important, poor fellow, suppose he gets worse from want of that mixture, he may grow weaker and weaker three times a day, great heavens, suppose, suppose he *dies*, Charlie, you don't know what it means."

"Quite sure I don't, but what are *you* worrying about it so much for, all of a sudden?"

Something still whispered to Theodore to keep his secret to himself so he prevaricated.

"Well, it was I who broke the bottle, wasn't it? And I'd feel kind of responsible if he dies," he said, at the same time thinking that in the event of such a thing happening, he would probably have little time to feel anything.

"Stuff," ejaculated his son, "why don't you try and have a sleep, just forty winks, you would feel in trim for dinner then."

“Sleep! sleep!” Theodore was now striding up and down the room running his fingers through his sodden hair. “Dinner! and poor Wopple perhaps at his last gasp. It’s terrible, terrible, Charlie,” he went on, “this suspense is killing, no, I won’t sit down, I’m going upstairs. You just run off and fetch that medicine.”

Charlie by this time thought it advisable to humour him and decided to send the doctor back in person. This strange behaviour of his worthy parent needed seeing to.

Had he seen Theodore’s actions after he had left him, he would have thought them stranger still. The little man watched from behind the curtains until his son had crossed the courtyard of the buildings. Then he waited till the last heavy footfall of Mrs. Batt had resounded on the stairs and the sound of vigorous splashings and snatches of the “Glory Song” proclaimed the good lady to be safely started on the evening’s washing-

up. Even then he did not seem satisfied, and waited a full five minutes by the clock before he stealthily ascended the stairs. They creaked abominably and at the door of Wopple's room he stopped to listen. All was quiet, save for the sound of deep regular breathing which came from within. Evidently Jeremiah was asleep. Cautiously Theodore turned the handle and inserted his head into the room. The sufferer roused a little as the draught caused by the open door stirred the curtains of the bed. He muttered some unintelligible words, then snored again louder than before. Theodore adjusted his glasses and bent over the hand that was thrown carelessly outside the coverlet, minutely comparing, line for line, his own palm with it. In some ways they differed, but the *affinity line* was there sure enough. It seemed to him to stand out in a bright red from the other lines on Jeremiah's coarse-looking hand. In his agitation some words escaped Theodore and the slum-

bering form stirred. Rubbing his eyes Jeremiah Wopple awoke.

"Why, who the—oh, it's *you*, is it? What's the matter anyway? A tucking of me up was yer?"

Theodore smiled a conciliatory smile.

"Hardly that," he said, "I came up to see if you were in want of anything."

"Very good on yer too, I'm sure," grunted Jerry, "but wot was yer a doing to me fist, feeling me pulse?"

"Just so," lied Theodore, "I'm a bit of a doctor myself, amateur you know."

"Well, I'm not on for any experiments I can tell yer, just let me alone, the other doc wouldn't like it, t'ain't perfessional etiquette."

Mr. MacStodger drew nearer.

"Mr. Wopple, I want to have a quiet talk with you."

"Do yer now? Fancy."

"Yes, you see, this accident has happened in my son's rooms and to a certain extent I feel myself responsible.

You have had a hard life, no doubt, I am going to try to make it easier for you."

"If I thought as 'ow—"

Theodore held up a warning hand and went on.

"Yes, it seems to me very hard lines that a man in your—er—profession should meet with additional trouble of any sort. Can't you imagine any more agreeable work, any nicer occupation?"

"Not 'arf, I can't," said Mr. Wopple fervently.

"Well, to come to the point. At my little place in Bamshire I am in need of a man to generally look after the estate. The work would not be hard, in fact your time would be almost entirely your own, at any rate until you became used to the place. I have a little cottage you could have to live in and being continually near you, I could, myself, see to your welfare."

"Goin' to make a hobby of me, eh what—kind of pet?"

“ Well, hardly that, I would expect you to work, not too hard, we don't want to knock you up, but it would be a great satisfaction to me to know that I had in some way compensated you for this affair.”

Theodore spoke at length, painting in glowing colours the delights of the country in general and Bamshire in particular, nor did he desist until he saw that Jeremiah had again fallen asleep. Assuring himself that it was not a fainting fit, he crept to the window and looked out over London. It was all but dark and a mist was coming up from the river. It was a restful scene and Theodore fell into a train of thought. If only he could keep this man in sight all would be well, he would see that he took no risks of cutting short his career. Metaphorically speaking he would wrap him up in cotton wool. He would be some trouble, no doubt, but then it was worth it. Fate had thrown Wopple into his hands and he would be a fool

to let him slip. It was curious to think that this poor man was, a few hours ago, nothing to him, now, he was all the world. Should he tell Charlie, or Charlotte? A little gasp escaped Theodore as he thought of his wife. No, he would tell nobody. The affair was his own and in his own hands it would remain.

He was aroused by a tap at the door. His "come in" was unnecessary, as turning from the window he saw the doctor was half way across the room.

Dr. Burnside was an elderly man of few words. He glanced enquiringly at Theodore, who introduced himself in a whisper so as not to disturb the sleeper. Here was a chance to find out Jeremiah's condition, and so allay his anxiety. Theodore seemed quite rational, and the medical man, bearing in mind what Charlie had told him, contented himself with merely noticing his actions and words.

"Have you brought it, the mixture?" was the first query put to him.

The doctor took the bottle from his tail pocket.

"Shall we wake him for it?" then asked Theodore.

"Considering it is a draught to induce sleep I hardly see the necessity," and Dr. Burnside pointed to the figure on the bed.

"Do you think there is any danger, serious danger I mean?"

"Not at all, not at all, my dear sir, quiet is all he wants now, the leg is setting nicely."

"And after that?"

"After that, well, he's hardly the sort of man one can order to the south of France you know, he'd think we were getting at him."

"But fresh air *would* do him good?"

"Most assuredly, the proper thing, but he can do without it."

"But he need not do without it, luckily," joyously exclaimed Theodore,

"I have offered him a position on my little place in the country, a nice easy crib, best air in the world."

Charlie's words returned to the doctor, in full force.

"It is not my affair, of course," he answered seriously, "but is it quite wise? You see, your son has told me who he is. He has no legal claim on you. I think it would be better to give the man a fiver and turn him loose. You don't know his character or anything about him. But, as I said before, it is no business of mine."

"Somehow, doctor, I feel drawn to the man, he seems a decent sort and after all, legal claim aside, I feel a sort of moral responsibility, you know."

Dr. Burnside as he took his leave told Theodore it was a pity there were not more like him in the world, privately he thought it a great blessing.

Charlie came in as the doctor left and found his father in better spirits and ready, at last, to dress again for

dinner. Where they dined or where they went afterwards is apart from this narrative. Suffice it to say that the time passed merrily and presumably wisely, judging from their fresh appearance at breakfast the next morning.

Mrs. Batt had surpassed herself. A substantial dish of eggs and bacon was flanked with little dainties procured from the *delicatessen* shop across the square. The obliging landlady had managed to put both the men up and they had slept comfortably. Theodore, always an early riser, was down first and had quite recovered his spirits. He felt disposed to view his little trouble as not possessing the terrors he had at first imagined. He was certainly a little anxious as to how the new hand would be welcomed at "The Mushrooms." Charlie had taken the news all right and had even called him a "brick." Would Charlotte call him a "brick" or something else? He would send a note to Cleo, enclosing a cheque and telling her he

had decided to drop the matter. To ensure his own life, he must protect that of Jeremiah. This was the work before him and he wanted no interference. Having once made up his mind to this, he felt easier, and enjoyed a hearty breakfast.

Charlie's punctuality and attention to his work, as a rule, left much to be desired, but on the mornings that his father honoured him with his presence he was exemplary. He was ready to start for the hospital by nine o'clock and, laden with books and instrument-cases, stood at his door waiting for the cab that was to take his parent to the station. After leaving copious directions with Charlie and Mrs. Batt as to the care of the patient, Theodore had thought it better to return to Bamford. Charlie was not sorry. After watching the cab out of sight, he returned to his room and put his books away. He yawned and thought of another hour in bed, but a crisp little cheque in his pocket from

his father, added to the perfect weather, decided otherwise, so he slipped into his flannels and at one o'clock sat down to lunch with a choice party at "The Roe-buck," at Richmond.

CHAPTER IV.

“ WOODBINE COTTAGE.”

“ AND so, I think I can safely leave it to you to see that the poor fellow is sent off in all comfort. I myself will meet him at the station and drive him to Woodbine Cottage. I have had new rubber tyres put on the ralli. I don't think, after all, you had better send him by the eleven o'clock, there is a train at 11-30 that stops at all stations to Bamford. I don't like these expresses, I cannot think they are as safe as the slower trains. There is another point that I want you to attend to.”——and so on——.

Charlie threw the long letter aside without attempting to finish it.

“ One chapter of the old boy’s epistles is enough for me lately. Nothing but Jeremiah. He seems to think he’s made of glass, rubber tyres indeed, I wonder he trusts the railway at all, bath-chair all the way would be more his mark, I should fancy.”

He turned again to his untasted breakfast. Wopple’s approaching departure had been celebrated in the usual manner the night before, and the morning meal did not attract Charlie. Luckily Jeremiah entered the room as he was preparing to wrap up his bacon in the newspaper, with the intention of dropping it down a drain on his way to the hospital. Mr. Wopple with his gargantuan appetite obviated this necessity by eating it himself. Charlie invariably disposed of the breakfasts he did not feel equal to, in order to avoid unpleasant explanations to Mrs. Batt. Apropos of these deceptive meals, he was fond of telling an

excellent story against himself. It appears that at one time, there lived in a well-like yard beneath his window, a lonely and very hungry dog who was chained to a tub. It was the simplest thing in the world for Charlie to drop his matutinal bacon within reach of this voracious animal who speedily removed all traces of the deed. This plan worked excellently to the mutual benefit of dog and man, until Mrs. Batt one morning sent up a mutton chop. In an idle moment and without weighing the consequences Charlie slid this dainty to the expectant canine, *bone and all*. The landlady's suspicions were at once aroused, she has never been able to account for the disappearance of that bone. Mr. MacStodger might have a large appetite, she told a neighbour, but she cannot think he quite ate that. The dog has since died.

At half-past ten Jeremiah, fortified with his double meal, was ready for his journey. He had sent to his mother, who

was spending an advanced age somewhere in Rotherhithe, for his trunk. This had arrived, a tin one, and in company with sundry bursting brown paper parcels it adorned the roof of the four-wheeler. Mr. Wopple's more cherished possessions he took inside with him securely tied up in a red handkerchief.

The aged mother had journeyed to Paddington to see the last of her dear son. She was crying profusely for no apparent reason whatever. Jerry comforted her as best he could.

" Yer see 'ow it is, muvver, this 'ere cove seems to 'ave taken a sort of fancy to yer 'umble, t'ain't my fault. You should look upon it as I do, a little bit of all right."

Between her sobs the old lady was understood to say that she wished her old man could have lived to see this day.

" I don't know wot the screw is down there," Jeremiah jerked his thumb in the direction of the engine, " but I'll

let you have a bit now and again. Wot d'yer say to 'arf a quid now, and I say muvver, dry them tears."

The little gold coin did that and Wopple, looking out as the coaches glided out from the platform, saw the buffet door framing the figure of a jovial old lady, brushing away the last vestige of a tear with the corner of a Paisley shawl and waving a glass of gin and water enthusiastically at the departing train.

MacStodger had taken the precaution of picking out a train that went no further than Bamford and it turned out to be a happy thought. The poor traveller was in a deep sleep when he arrived at the pretty little station and Theodore had to make his way through all the carriages before he came upon the sleeping figure. Before awaking him, he cast a comprehensive glance round the compartment and called a porter.

"Take these," he indicated first the tin trunk and then the even more offending red-handkerchief, "and have

them sent up to Woodbine Cottage by the carrier.”

As the porter departed, Jeremiah, with a grunt, awoke and Theodore, greeting him cordially, led the way to the ralli-car. There was a little difficulty in hoisting him up to the seat, the injured leg still being somewhat stiff.

As they drove along MacStodger explained a few things about the place.

Woodbine Cottage, he told Jeremiah, was a little building situated in the grounds of “ The Mushrooms ” but about a quarter of a mile from the house itself. Mrs. Pinnitt, who lived in an adjacent cottage to Woodbine, would “ do ” for him in the way of cooking and cleaning. He would find lunch ready for him on his arrival and in the afternoon Theodore advised him to rest. Should he feel like sleeping he was to be sure to have the window open an inch or two at the top. He was on no account to worry and in the evening Theodore would visit him again.

An hour later Jeremiah sat in the little parlour digesting a remarkably fine lunch. Outside in the tiny garden the bees were humming in and out among the sweet sultans, roses, and orange lilies. His whole latter life had been spent in wandering from house to house, a day in a West-end mansion, followed by, perhaps, a week in Suburbia, with an occasional job up the river, but he was now feeling at peace with himself and all the world. His only disturbing thought was wondering how long it would last, or if it were all a dream.

The room was the more comfortable for being small. It was well furnished in cottage style. Mrs. Pinnitt informed him that the previous tenant had gone to Canada with the idea of bettering himself, and Theodore, from a desire to help the emigrant had bought the furniture as it stood. On the flowered wall-paper hung a large oleograph of Queen Victoria and a smaller one of the Pope. The emigrant's father and mother occu-

pied places on either side of the fireplace. The faded lady over the door, was probably, thought Mrs. Pinnitt, the emigrant's aunt. The other mural decorations consisted of a grocer's almanac of the previous year, a brightly coloured print of the Phoenix Park murders and a rather choice engraving of The Earl of Eglington's "Flying Dutchman" beating the Earl of Zetland's "Voleur" at York on the 13th of May, 1857, in a match for a thousand sovereigns a side. There were a few books on a little shelf and Jeremiah rose to examine them. His vocation had given him a great chance of reading and for a man in his position he was rather fond of books. The volumes he handled now were, however, hardly his style, some of them bore his patron's book-plate on the fly-leaf, but the majority were inscribed in a cramped upright penmanship "Agatha Blarm, 'Ramayana,' Bamford, Surrey." Wopple glanced at the titles, they seemed to be all of one

class. "Health in the Home," "First Aid to the Apparently Drowned," "Exercises and Hints for Body-building," "Is Vegetarianism a Sin?" "Nuts, When and How to Eat them." These were only a few of them.

Jerry put the books back in disgust. "Ought to be 'ealthy I'm sure," he grunted as he drew a crumpled "Pink 'un" out of his pocket and read himself to sleep.

He was awakened by Theodore's voice in the garden talking to Mrs. Pinnitt,

"Asleep? Did you not hear my instructions as to the windows? You must get Mr. Pinnitt to put a wedge in them all so that they *can't* be shut. Fresh air is everything. No, no, don't do it now, you'll wake him, nature's sweet restorer comes even before fresh air. What do you think, my dear Miss Blarm?"

At this hint that Theodore was not alone, Jeremiah peeped out through the curtains. At the same moment Agatha

peeped in. They nodded and he opened the window.

“ This is a very dear neighbour of mine, Mr. Wopple,” said Theodore by way of introduction. “ You will no doubt be very good friends. Miss Blarm only lives a stone’s-throw away. She is coming sometimes to read to you.”

Jerry jerked his head in the direction of the shelf.

“ Them books ? ” he queried.

“ Those first but I have plenty more,” said Agatha, “ it is an engrossing subject, that of Physical Culture. I see you have been reading, isn’t that pink paper bad for the eyes ? I must read some of it to you to see.”

Jeremiah grinned in anticipation.

“ Don’t know if yer’d care much about it, miss, not but what there are some good bits in it too, but nuffink about ‘ealth.”

It will be gathered from the foregoing that Theodore had broken through his first idea of secrecy and had taken the



old lady into his confidence. The secret had been too much for him to bear alone, and it was one after Miss Blarm's own heart. Her thorough belief in it all, coupled with her infectious enthusiasm, had a stimulating effect on him and although little fits of depression still came upon him, the knowledge that his secret was shared enabled him to throw them off fairly easily. There was no disguising the fact, however, that the

whole affair was a great worry to him. He lost a deal of his former high spirits, he was slightly irritable at times and disinclined to meet his friends, especially Colonel Montgeyer. That he had rubber heels fixed to all his boots alone showed the state of his nerves.

It was not a very pleasant dinner at “ The Mushrooms ” on the evening of Jeremiah’s arrival. Charlotte had caught a glimpse of the man through the privet hedge as she was returning from a croquet match that afternoon. She had never intended for one moment to approve of the new bailiff and her remarks about him were far from flattering.

“ A perfect demon, my dear,” she said *to* Lucy but *at* Theodore, “ a regular criminal, I really feel quite frightened about the silver. I shall have ‘ Ki-yi ’ to sleep in the house, she would bark and perhaps bite him, that is, if she had the chance, but I’ve heard that these ruffians think nothing of murdering

little dogs, or little men either for the matter of that."

Theodore hated any reference to his stature.

"I really think I shall have barbed wire put round those windows that are close to the ground," Charlotte went on mercilessly, the tail of her eye on her unfortunate husband. "I expect he's armed to the teeth, some of those men carry awful weapons, I believe."

"Can't you describe him, mother? I mean his face," asked Lucy.

"Well, he's exactly like Peace, only much bigger. Of course we must give up our intended visit to Aunt Jemima, I couldn't think of leaving the house now, I would never forgive myself if anything happened."

This was bad news for poor Theodore, he had timed everything so nicely. The absence of his wife and daughter had had a place in his programme. He would have had time to get Jeremiah used to the estate before their return. He did not lose hope however.

“ I think you really ought to go, Charlotte, you see Aunt is expecting you both and it will never do to offend her.”

Aunt Jemima lived at Brighton, mostly in a bath-chair. She was very old, very ugly and very wealthy and this latter point weighed very heavily with Charlotte. She had to look to Theodore for all her money and she longed for independence. Aunt Jemima certainly liked her and the situation of affairs was very promising. Charlotte well knew that to put off her visit would offend the irascible old lady and this she could not afford to do. She decided to go. She would take all her jewels with her and send the silver to the bank.

Theodore kept Jeremiah as much as possible within the precincts of Woodbine Cottage for the few days that intervened before the departure of his wife and daughter for Brighton, but it was not until the train had actually left the station with them that he breathed freely.

* * * * *

There is a green hill not far away from "The Mushrooms" from which the inhabitants of Bamford boast that the Crystal Palace can be seen on a fine day. That this was a drawback occurred to only the more intellectual of them.

On the morning after the departure of the ladies Jeremiah was leaning on the stile from which people were wont to point out the sight to their admiring friends. This morning the glittering dome with its attendant towers was mercifully hidden from view by a slight heat-mist that was rising from the meadows.

Jeremiah was smoking a meditative pipe, his bare forehead turned to the south-east, from which quarter a gentle wind could be felt at that attitude. In short, Mr. Jeremiah Wopple was having a "cooler." The previous evening he had, for the first time, found the hours hang rather heavily and had paid a visit to the "Live and let Live." The enter-



Jerry

prising landlord, scenting further business, had made a point of treating the man well and he had made many friends. The result was—well Jeremiah's brow was turned to the south-east and he was having a "cooler."

From his inner pocket he drew out a letter and read it through carefully, afterwards looking at his watch.

"Better look slippy," he murmured and putting on his hat he started at a fairly brisk pace down the hill. Fifteen minutes walking brought him to "The Mushrooms" and he was ushered into Theodore's presence.

The little man was in the library and greeted Jeremiah cordially. He indicated an easy chair near the window and the bailiff dropped into it.

"I want you to do a little job for me," Theodore began, "but you have had a hot walk. Will you take a little currant wine?"

"Trifle rich for me," answered Jerry, "but I fink a little soda and whisky,

just a sensation, feelin' a bit seedy, this morning, I am.”

Theodore's hand was on the bell, he paused.

“ Nothing serious I hope ? ” he asked anxiously.

“ Fresh air, I fink,” said Jerry, “ ain't been used to it, I ain't, be all right after a tonic.”

He was supplied with a modest “ two fingers ” and felt better.

“ Now to business,” went on Theodore, “ I have a young horse, a favourite of mine, that has been at the vet.'s for the last six months getting over a little accident. I have a letter here from the man, saying the cure is complete and I am to send for him next Monday. I will be in town that day, so I want you to go for me. Can you box a horse ? ”

Jerry had, years ago, had quite a reputation with the gloves, but he could not understand this question. It reminded him of the “ Aquarium ” and kangaroos. He hesitated and Theodore proceeded.

"I mean, can you put him safely on the rail, the vet.'s place is about twenty miles down the line. I suppose you understand horses?"

"Been among 'em all me life."

As a matter of fact Jerry knew nothing whatever of equine matters, but if there is one subject more than another, of which a man is loth to profess ignorance, it is horses.

"Then take this card, it's his address, but I'll see you again before you go. By the bye I forgot to point out to you that I have had a fire escape fixed in your bedroom, have you noticed it?"

"Sure, 'anging on the wall."

"Hanging on the wall? No, a little iron ladder outside the window, reaching to the garden," explained Theodore.

"Ain't seen no ladder, then wot's that there thing 'anging on the wall, Indy-rubber ropes, wiv' 'andles?"

"Oh! that's an expander for the chest, most healthy thing to use. I'll tell you all about that when you are

stronger. You must use that every morning then.”

“Can’t get the bloomin’ thing off the wall.”

“You don’t have to,” said Theodore.

As Jeremiah took his departure he broached the subject of wages.

“Must ’ave a bit in me pocket, yer know, sir, besides I got a widdered muvver, eighty-four she is.”

Theodore fairly beamed.

“A long-lived family?” he asked.

“Fair,” said Jerry, “me father died at seventy-nine, smoked too ’ard ’e did.”

Mr. MacStodger wrote a cheque for ten pounds and handed it to Jerry. He did not say if it was for a week or a month.

When Jeremiah left “The Mushrooms” he made a bee-line for the “Live and let Live.”

An idea had struck him, he saw a way out of the horse difficulty.

CHAPTER V.

"TINKER" AND THE "TADPOLE."

MINE host was standing at his door complacently surveying a brand new sign he had just had swung. He drew aside on perceiving Jeremiah and followed him into the tiny bar parlour, a pleasant little apartment with a geranium-obscured window.

"Good-morning sir, get home all right?"

Jerry ignored the question and put another.

"Mr. Murden been in?"

The landlord glanced at an old grandfather clock that stood in the corner. "'Ardly 'is time yet, can't be long, though, pretty regular 'e be."



SURVEYING
A BRAND
NEW SIGN

The words had hardly left Reuben Slark's lips before the man under discussion framed himself in the doorway.

Micky Murden was commonly known as the "Tadpole" by his intimates and the appellation was a happy one. Nature had endowed him with a massive head and shoulders and that seemed to be about all. Below that he dwindled gradually away. The horsey cut of his breeches and gaiters made his legs appear still smaller than they really were and considerably helped the almost ludicrous resemblance he bore to the embryo frog.

He nodded to Jeremiah as he took a seat and said something about the weather. Then he turned to the landlord and asked what price "Water-flower" started at.

"Tain't 'arf a 'orse," he added.

This gave Wopple the opening he wanted.

"Pretty well up in 'orses, eh?" he asked.

The “ Tadpole ” turned in his chair and faced him. “ What I don’t know,” he said impressively, “ ain’t worth nuffink. Ask Rube here.”

The landlord concurred, Jerry went on.

“ Want to earn a bit, Mr. Murden ? ”

Micky was cautious and anxious not to commit himself. He looked enquiringly at his questioner.

Jeremiah pulled out the slip of card that Theodore had given him and passed it to the man. The “ Tadpole’s ” education had been somewhat neglected in early life and reading was to him a hidden mystery. Nevertheless he took the card and looked at it. Then he handed it back with the remark that he could never see without his glasses.

At this Jerry took the little piece of pasteboard to the window and read aloud, “ *William Wilson, M.R.C.V.S., The Weather Cocks, Paddox Green, Hants.* Wonder if you know ’im ? ”

“ Know ’im, why I used to be along of ’im at Market ’Arboro’.”

'Tadpole'



“ Then you’re my man, I’m a-goin’ down to ’is place on Monday to fetch a ’orse for the guv’nor, you know, up at ‘ The Mushrooms,’ and I want somebody with me. ’Course I can manage the ’orse all right but I like company and I’ll need a bit of ’elp in puttin’ ’im in the truck.”

“ Been on grass ’as ’e ? ”

“ Dunno,” said Jerry, “ suppose so, unless they keep ’im on ice this weather.”

Micky ignored the levity.

“ Wot time yer startin’ ? ” he asked.

The time-table was requisitioned and all preliminaries arranged. Jeremiah then went home to lunch with a lighter heart, the little trip into Hampshire had not appealed to him previously.

Theodore had, on Jeremiah’s arrival, sent his own tailor to fit the bailiff out in clothes suitable to his fresh calling and it was a new and wonderful Jerry that met the “ Tadpole ” at the station on the following Monday. From bowler to boots he was a harmony in brown (if

one excepted his tie which was of a vivid crimson). There was a distinct horsey cut about the garments with which their wearer was well pleased. Seeing that the "Tadpole" had a straw between his teeth, Jeremiah looked round for one likewise.

The journey to Paddox Green occupied about forty-five minutes and by noon they were well on the road to "The Weather Cocks."

'Doctor' Wilson was somewhere about the place they were told, and after a little search they came across him in the meadow where MacStodger's horse was turned out.

The animal himself, a handsome strawberry roan with black points, was standing under a hedge, waging war against innumerable flies. He eyed the men suspiciously and wickedly. Jeremiah fancied he looked at *him* particularly.

Wilson was a genial man and made them very welcome. He insisted on their joining him at lunch. "There

was no train till four o'clock, they could catch the brute (meaning the horse) after refreshing themselves," he said.

Jerry and the "Tadpole" needed little pressing. They were hungry and thirsty after their hot walk. Seated before an enormous cold sirloin and tankards of foaming ale the meal passed merrily enough. Wilson delighted his hearers with hunting yarns of his practice in Leicestershire and many were the reminiscences brought up in which the "Tadpole" figured. So comfortable and "set" did they become that when Jerry suggested a move to the field neither of his companions seemed disposed to join him.

"You catch him, Mr. Wopple, and bring him round to the gates. Micky will help me look out his clothing, you'll find a halter on that little gate," and the vet. pointed out through the window.

Jerry went cold all over, but he was not without pluck. He drained off an-



other bumper of the "doctor's" home-brewed and departed.

On arriving at the meadow, the horse, who was named "Tinker," was looking over the gate by which his intending captor wished to enter. Jerry thought he seemed to be expecting him. On his way up he had examined the halter closely, but could make nothing of it, it must either be incomplete or tangled he thought. He retained it, however, as a possible weapon of defence.

Jeremiah looked round for another opening, and spying a gap in the hedge he crawled through. The horse watched him intently. Jerry, having read something to the effect, fixed him with his eye as a possible means of subduing the animal. Tinker did the same and then commenced a curious rotary movement, in ever widening circles and increasing speed. This went on for some time till the futility of it all came home to Jerry. He sat on the gate and softly swore. The horse took up a position in the middle

of the field, rolling over and over, in what Jeremiah took to be paroxysms of mirth. He even imagined that the frogs in an adjacent pond were croaking derisively.

After about twenty minutes on the gate the "Tadpole" came up.

"Not got 'im yet?" he asked.

"I've 'ad 'im twice," answered Jerry, "but he seemed to somehow slip, you 'ave a try."

To Jeremiah's eyes the subsequent proceedings seemed absurdly simple. the "Tadpole" took the halter and walked up to "Tinker," addressing the horse all the time in a gruff voice, and most profanely. Jerry would never have dared to talk to the horse like it. Micky's way seemed to answer, nevertheless. Tinker walked quietly up and was secured and in a few minutes he stood at Wilson's gate.

Jerry thought he ought to make some enquiry as to the horse's condition.

"Suppose 'e's quite cured, sir?"

“ Sound as a bell of brass,” answered the vet. “ My respects to your guv’nor, I’ll be in Bamford in a week or two and I may see him.”

Jerry took a note of this and grasping the halter with a firm hand started on the journey to the station.

“ Wot’s he mean, Micky, ‘ Sounds like a bell of brass ’ ? ” asked the bailiff.

Micky grinned and explained. At the same time a motor of many horse power passed. Tinker behaved abominably. Jerry thinks he kicked his shin *before* biting his arm but the two came with such suddenness that they seemed simultaneous. Tinker then trod on his new boots.

“ You lead ’im a bit, Micky,” said Jerry, “ I think I’d better walk a bit behind, then I can take the numbers of them cars wot upset ’im. I’d ’ave a new suit out of that there ’airy bloke, but wot with the dust and Tinker I didn’t ’ave time.

He took from his pocket a piece of

paper and a stub of pencil. Then he dropped about thirty feet to the rear.

It was hardly the day that one would choose to lead a horse that was just "off the grass" for two miles along a dusty road. It was terribly close, huge copper-coloured clouds were massing in the south-west and there was a hot stillness in the air that was most oppressive. The only one who did not seem to mind the climatic conditions was Tinker himself. It was six months since he had been on a road and the novelty of it tickled him. Every gateway, signpost, dog and other unconsidered trifle of a country road possessed for him the most lively interest. If after passing a row of a dozen red-brick houses, he came to one of yellow bricks he stopped and examined it narrowly. A level-crossing particularly delighted him. By the time he was safely boxed, the four o'clock train was a thing of the past. There was nothing to do but shunt the im-

prisoned animal on to a siding, there to await the 5.40 up.

Jerry and the “Tadpole” mopped their brows and took up their positions on a pair of convenient milk churns. They kept their eye on the horse-box, however. From its interior came, from time to time, dull and muffled sounds. At intervals it was seen to rock gently from side to side.

The two men travelled in the little compartment that is part and parcel of a horse-box. “Tinker” peeped through the aperture at them and his eye had meaning in it. Jerry was devoutly thankful when he felt the brakes being applied for Bamford.

As the “Tadpole” followed the bailiff out on to the platform, a curious thing happened. He was roughly thrust back, with whispered instructions from Jerry to “lie low.” A well known figure had appeared crossing the bridge from the London arrival platform. It was Theodore. He saw Jerry and rushed towards

him dropping his gloves and evening paper as he ran.

"What has happened?" he gasped, anxiously pointing to Jerry's torn clothes and general dishevelled appearance. "There's been an accident, I know there has, tell me, quick."

Jerry saw the chance of making capital over this little trip.

"Haccident's right, sir," he looked ruefully down at his clothes, "never knew a 'orse like 'im. Mind I don't say nuffink against the 'orse, as a 'orse, I s'pects it's his play, p'raps its the way 'e 'as been brought up."

Jerry saw that he had an attentive listener and went on, letting his imagination run riot. He had been quite alone, he told him, and had boxed the horse entirely himself. The forty-five minutes he had spent in that box reminded him of a job he had once had in his previous career when he had levied a distraint on the owner of a private lunatic asylum. This was much worse.

Theodore commiserated, “ My poor, poor man,” he said.

“ Sir,” went on Jeremiah, “ it’s a wonder I’m alive, that it is, ’e started quiet enough, fact, too quiet, couldn’t get ’im along nohow, would stop and eat grass ’e would. When ’e did move, there was no ’olding ’im. Dragged me over a level crossing in front of a train ’e did.”

Theodore shuddered.

“ Then ’e tried to throw me in a pond, along of a lot of ducks. ’Ow I ’eld ’im goodness only knows.”

He looked at the box, “ Shall I get ’im out ? ”

“ By no means,” said Theodore, “ certainly not, you’ve run enough risks for one day. Lock up the box and tell the porter I’ll send John down later for him.”

The horse-box still containing the faithful “ Tadpole ” was accordingly safely locked up and again relegated to a siding. As Jerry left the station yard in Mac-

Stodger's ralli he gave a glance at it. He breathed a sigh of relief.

Micky had already squeezed his head and shoulders through the little window.

"If the 'Tadpole' can get 'is 'ed through, the rest of 'im is like shelling peas" he said to himself.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BURGLARY.

It was mid-afternoon at Woodbine Cottage and very warm indeed. Jeremiah sat at the open window to get the full benefit of the faint breeze that stirred the little frilled draw-curtains. In the distance he could just make out Sir John's men busy with their second crop of hay, he noticed Harry was working as well as the best of them, now on the rick, now pitching off from the waggon. The little garden shimmered in the heat and a great bee, heavy with honey, hung over a cluster of lilies. Jerry saw him waddle busily into the snowy cup of one of them and watched with a lazy interest for him to waddle



out again. From an adjacent field came the regular whirr of a "self-binder" at work, the sound mingling with the aromatic odour of freshly-cut horse-mint. Mrs. Pinnitt's cat even found the purple

patch of shade thrown by the empty water-butt preferable to her usual sun-bath in the centre of the path.

There was another regular sound, this one coming from the interior of the little parlour in a droning monotone.

"——— to take three deep breaths with one of the arms tightly pressed to the side, the other in a position

horizontal to the body. The chest must be well thrown out, the head slightly tilted backwards——” .

Jerry's attention wandered again. His friend the bee had emerged from the scented cavern of the lily. He watched him swing heavily over the hedge. The dirge-like sound went on.

“ —— should consist of a plate of porridge, a little milk and some nuts. It is most necessary to bear in mind that to the student of physical culture it is of supreme importance that the diet should be as——”

This went on for some time and Jerry pulled himself together as he heard the book close with a little bang.

“ I think that is enough for to-day,” said Miss Blarm.

Jerry thought so too, but did not say so.

Agatha went on.

“ Before I go, Mr. Wopple, there is a little matter I have often wanted to

• speak to you on, but have hardly liked to. The fact is I am rather badly in want of a "medium" just now."

Jeremiah interrupted her, he did not approve of women smoking and told her so.

The spinster giggled nervously.

"Quite a natural mistake, oh yes, quite natural, but it is not a cigar I want, I mean I require help in my *séances*."

Wopple eyed her enquiringly.

"You wonder why I speak to you, I will tell you. I had an uncle who was a splendid medium, he is dead now, poor man and I hope happy"—a pause—"you are very like him when you smile. This made me think perhaps that"—

"'Arf a mo," interrupted the bailiff, "it's like walkin' in yer sleep, ain't it?"

Agatha nodded. "Very like, only deeper, infinitely deeper. I have brought this little work for you to read at your leisure, you will see what an entrancing

study it is. You converse with departed spirits, you know, you will perhaps be able to talk with my dead uncle."

"Why?" asked Jerry.

Miss Blarm said she had no idea it was so late, and hurried away.

The lady had been a great deal at the cottage during the last few days. The entire family from "The Mushrooms" were at Brighton. Aunt Jemima had at last left that charming Sussex resort for a happier sphere and numerous bereaved and disinterested relatives had invaded the Palmeira Square mansion in full strength.

Theodore had at first firmly refused to leave home, he saw no excuse for taking Jerry with him and the thought of leaving him to his own devices was distasteful. However, a not unnatural desire to be in at the will-reading, added to Agatha's assurances of her watchful services, had decided him, and with many qualms he had torn himself away in time for the funeral. As it was, poor

Jerry was not a little bewildered by his employer's correspondence. Every post brought a black-edged envelope containing anxious enquiries, and giving Jerry little useless commissions with the one idea of keeping him about the neighbourhood and incidentally under the eye of Miss Agatha.

Jerry slept till tea-time and was as usual awakened by the postman with Theodore's third letter that day. The bailiff opened it listlessly and read it while he had his tea.

He perused the first two pages in a vacant way but at the third his manner changed, he held his cup suspended in the air for a moment, then setting it down hastily, grabbed the letter from where it had been resting propped up against a pot of honey and rushed with it to the window. His eyes opened wider and wider as he read.

“——— A curious thing has happened that is most remarkable as a coincidence and at the same time

an event of considerable importance to you personally. To be brief, my late aunt has left you a legacy of two hundred pounds. "Why?" you will ask. I will tell you, but be calm. I have tried to write this in as gentle a way as possible, as the shock of sudden news, good or bad, is apt to act on one's nerves, to the detriment of one's health. Had I not written I was afraid that some one might have heard the news and told you too suddenly. I was only reading in the paper the other day, how an aged peasant of Brittany, fell down dead on hearing that he had won, I think, six million francs (or was it eight million? I forget which) in a lottery. It is therefore with considerable apprehension that I pen this letter. Do you remember, some five years ago, saving from beneath the wheels of a char-à-banc in the King's Road, Brighton, a little shaggy dog? That

little shaggy dog belonged to my late aunt. The little brute is still alive and this morning bit my wife, who was examining a desk in her aunt's room. Your heroic act of five years ago was not forgotten by my departed relative and the legacy I have told you of is the result——”

Jeremiah finished the letter and replaced it in its envelope quite coolly. He thought the aged peasant must have been a poor kind of a fool after all. Curiously enough he himself felt very disinclined to fall down dead, or even to give way to a fit for that matter. He walked quietly and sedately up to the “Live and let Live” and ordered a bottle of champagne from which he gave Reuben a glass. He then waited with what patience he could for the habitués of the place to make their appearance. He must have a big audience for his wonderful news.

They dribbled in one by one, Sir John's gardener, Jack the hay-tyer, the “Tad-

pole," Walter the Smith, the signalman from the level-crossing (who might be station-master when they built the station), and the cowman from the farm. The arrival of "Mr. Charles," a little old gentleman of some eighty summers, who came in with a lantern, made the party complete. Jerry, who was town-bred, noticed with interest the manners of the natives. As each new-comer entered he was offered a mug of beer by one of the men already there. Raising it to his lips he would nod to the company and take a deep draught. When his own pint was served to him he returned the compliment but Jerry noticed that it was etiquette for the earlier arrival to take but a little sip. Some of the men turned the pot round, some gave the rim a rub with their coat sleeve, the majority, however, seemed perfectly indifferent to microbes.

It was the custom for Sir John's gardener (who had some learning) to read aloud each evening the news of the

SOME
EIGHTY
SUMMERS.



day and Jerry waited until he saw him bring out his spectacle-case, when he deemed the time ripe to tell of his luck. The effect was all that he could wish for, the reading was postponed and Jeremiah's fortune discussed in all its bearings. There was only one among them that seemed at all uneasy at the news. The "Tadpole" made furtive signs to the legatee that he wanted private talk with him. It was also noticed that Jerry tried his best to avoid Micky's eye. At last the signs grew so noticeable that there was nothing else for him to do but follow the "Tadpole" when he walked out of the little bar with a great waving of arms.

From the open door of the inn a shaft of yellow light shot out into the night for a few yards. The two men walked out of its rays and descended the road that led to the town. It was not quite dark yet and as Jeremiah looked at Micky he saw he was labouring under some little excitement. His mouth

worked and he moistened his lips with his tongue before he spoke.

" 'Ow does this 'ere dollop of your'n affect our little job ? " were his first words.

" Wot little job ? "

" There, that's just 'ow I thought it 'ud be," said the " Tadpole " with a fine disgust, " it's all right for you, but 'ow about me ? Where do *I* come in ? Jolly easy to be 'onest wiv' two 'undred jimmies at yer back. Look 'ere, either you go through with our job or give me fifty and I'll tear up your letter, my missus read it to me and she says it's 'criminatin.' If yer don't I send that there letter up to 'The Mush-er-ooms.' I mean it, mind yer."

" If I don't do neither ? " asked Jerry.

" I'm tellin' yer ain't I ? Mr. Theodore 'as your letter in the mornin'."

" You'd suffer às well as me," said Jeremiah, " it's addressed to you."

" I'd be miles away, there ain't no ropes on me at this 'ere place," retorted

Micky with an ugly grin that showed a row of broken teeth like tombstones in a city church-yard, "we'd much better stick to our bargain, it will save a lot of trouble. Worth a lot more too." He lowered his voice, "Sure the silver's not at the bank?"

"Yes," Jerry's voice sounded harsh and it was with a catch in his throat that he went on, "I'm willin', never meant to back out, I didn't. See yer at eleven thirty sharp."

The two men shook hands and the "Tadpole" turned and went down the hill.

Jerry stood and watched the misshapen figure with the rusty clothes as he merged into the opal of the twilight. He never thought Micky could look so in harmony with the surroundings. He thought he ought to stand out in dead black, or red, or something, instead of being softened into beautiful purples and blues.

He laughed at his fancy and returned to the inn. The reading was in full

swing. Sir John's gardener had taken up his position beside the fireplace, under an engraving of the Tichborne trial, and was reading slowly, a period between most of the words.

——“General. S-t-o-e-s-s-e-l. Stussle. was. received. with. great. cheering. but. there. are. rumours. afloat. in. the. capital. that. he. has. not. done. all. that.——”

What the defender of Port Arthur did or did not do had no interest for Jerry, he took Theodore's letter out of his pocket and read it through again. His conversation with the “Tadpole,” together with the kind words of his patron, affected him more than he cared to think. He was by no means new to crime, but in the light of his suddenly acquired wealth, it seemed a black thing he was going to do that night. He sat and brooded over it till Reuben closed his house. Then he slowly walked to his cottage.

He sank into the big chintz-covered

armchair and tried to read Miss Blarm's book. It was no good, the clock on the mantelpiece seemed to fascinate him with its tick. When it struck eleven he looked positively frightened. He rose and shook himself. "Jerry," he said, "you're a fool."

He began filling a little black bag with implements that he took from underneath some clothes in a monk's-bench in the corner. The lamp-light glinted on bright steel. At a quarter past the hour he put out the lamp and closing the door softly behind him, went out into the darkness. On leaving the gate he made straight across the silent turf to where a plantation loomed black against the indigo of the sky. Skirting the western side of the dwarf firs he came upon Micky, who, seated on the grass was busy exchanging his boots for felt slippers.

The two men gave a nod of silent greeting and set off across the park in the direction of the house. Neither

spoke a word until they were underneath the windows of Theodore's study, when the "Tadpole" reached out his hand.

"The putty," he said in a low voice.

Jerry fumbled in his bag and brought out a large soft mass which he put into the outstretched hand.

Micky worked it with his fingers till it was pliable enough to suit him and then stuck it on the pane near the latch. He waited a few moments to let it set, before he deftly traced a circle round it with a diamond, then using the putty as a handle he removed the round of glass. To insert his arm and undo the fastening was only the work of a moment.

"Along the passage and the fust door on yer right," began Jerry. His voice, intended for a whisper, was a falsetto of anxiety.

The "Tadpole" put his huge hand on Jeremiah's lips, "I know," he hissed, "keep quiet, can't yer? You've got mouth enough for two sets of teeth, you 'ave."

CHAPTER VII.

AT BRIGHTON.

THEODORE looked well in black and was quite a noticeable figure as he sauntered down the Kings Road. The will had been quite satisfactory to him and his (with the exception of a large legacy to the Society for promoting Cruelty to Christians, or kindness to dumb waiters or something) and his grief was dispersing like a summer haze. He looked at his watch and found it wanted but a quarter of an hour to noon. Turning up Ship Street he entered the Bodega. The first person he saw was Jeremiah, who was standing at the counter. Although his back was towards Theodore, one glance was sufficient for him to recognize the bailiff, the clothes alone would have

told anyone from Bamford who their wearer was. MacStodger quietly slipped out again unperceived and crossing the street took up a position outside a tobacconist's and watched the wine-shop door. He did not know quite why he did this except that it gave him time to think. What was Jerry doing at Brighton? How was it that he had not called at Palmeira Square? On second thoughts Theodore remembered he had been out all the morning and had perhaps missed him. It was weary work waiting so he again crossed the road and re-entering the Bodega touched Jerry on the shoulder.

Jeremiah started as though he had been shot. Luckily for him he knocked a basketful of biscuits off the counter and while stooping to pick them up was able to regain some of his composure. He waited for Theodore to speak.

"Well, this is a surprise, Mr. Wopple, I suppose you came down to see me on business, is it anything important? Have

you been to the house? I have been out since ten."

This gave the bailiff a chance.

"Yuss," he answered, "it must 'ave been about 'arf past when I got there. There was an important message come last night for you from Sir John. 'E thought you was back and when 'e found you wasn't 'e sent me off with it. I've left it up at the 'ouse for yer."

"Then I must get along at once," exclaimed Theodore, "come on with me and we can have lunch, we return this afternoon, there's a train about five, —ten to, I think."

But Jerry excused himself, there was a sister he wanted to call on as he was in Brighton. He would meet the Mac-Stodgers at the station at half past four and help them with the luggage.

Theodore swallowed Jerry's story and a glass of madeira, after which he started off post haste for Palmeira Square.

Charlotte was on the steps, a telegram in her hand.

"I'd made up my mind to open this at one o'clock if you didn't come. It arrived about an hour ago," she said.

"What did Wopple say?"

"Who?"

"Wopple, Jerry, Jeremiah."

"Can't you forget Jerry for *one* moment, it's nothing else but Wopple, Wopple, Wopple lately, it's perfectly sickening."

"But he's been here with a letter from Sir John, I've just seen him."

"More than I have then," said Charlotte, "nobody's been here all the morning except the boy with the telegram, aren't you going to read it?"

Theodore tore open the buff envelope.

He took some little time to decipher the wire.

*"macstodger palmeira house brigh-
ton come home mushrooms burgled
wopple gone blarm."*

The flimsy paper dropped from his hand and he gazed at his wife. Char-

lotte seized it and as she read it a look of triumph came over her face.

"I told you so," she said.

She was a practical woman, however, and this was all the revenge she allowed herself at the moment. She caught her husband by the shoulders and turned him round.

"Quick, you say you've seen him, perhaps you may find him if you hurry. The villain."

Theodore essayed to speak but an imperious gesture from his wife sent him hurrying away. First a return visit to the Bodega, no Jerry, a frantic whip round to other likely places, down East Street, up Middle Street, round by the Pavilion, a look in the Post-office, no Wopple. At the foot of Preston Street he had to pause for lack of breath. It was now two o'clock, but find Jeremiah he would.

It must not be supposed that his idea was to give his bailiff in charge, that was not Theodore's intention at all. It

was to *save* him that he was taking this frantic rush round Brighton. He saw that on a man who had lived for some months on the fat of the land, a stretch of prison fare might have disastrous effects. He must prevent Jerry's arrest at all costs. The village constable, Theodore knew, was a dull man and would wait until the master of "The Mushroom" came home before taking any big steps. If only he could find Jerry within the next few hours he could get him to Newhaven and so on to Dieppe, before the machinery of the law was set in motion against him. But how to find him was the question. He returned once more to the Bodega and this time picked up a small clue. The attendant told him that the gentleman had not waited long after Theodore's departure in the morning. (Theodore could well believe that). He had turned up an A. B. C. and had consulted his watch. The little yellow railway guide was still on the ledge where Jerry had left it and

Theodore saw it lay open at the London trains.

A fly to the station was his next move and there the stern chase came to an end and he saw the bailiff. Jerry was not alone, on either side walked a policeman of the borough, whilst at his heels followed a motley crowd of porters, children, loafers and cabmen. The game was up, all Theodore's endeavours would now be unavailing. He noticed with a pang that Wopple looked really ill and with a sick dread at his heart he drew back into a corner of the fly and was driven back to Palmeira Square.

"Have you got him?" Charlotte asked when he came in.

"*They* have," said her husband shortly.

"He'll be hanged before long, I know he will."

This was more than poor Theodore in his present nervous state could stand. He spoke rudely to her for the first time in his life.

He strode through the vestibule and

ascending the broad staircase entered the room that he had occupied during his residence in his late aunt's house. He was thoroughly dejected, he began to think that the strain of the last month or two had been too much for him. He sank down on the Chesterfield and buried his face in his hands. For the moment he gave up all hope ; all his strivings had been vain. They would take Jerry away and feed him on bread and water, a killing diet, and some stuff called "skilly." They would make him clean out his cell at five in the morning, they would——

Charlotte put her head round the door.

"I'm sorry the silver wasn't at the bank, but remember I warned you that——"

"Oh d—— the silver."

Mrs. MacStodger withdrew, it was evidently not an opportune moment to bait her husband. The interruption was, however, timely, it roused Theodore from his despair.

"There must be a way," he murmured

rising and pacing to and fro, "there may be no evidence, at the worst he can. escape. Sir John's on the bench, I'll get him to help me."

The absurdity of a magistrate conniving at a prisoner's escape did not strike him at the moment. Theodore began packing automatically, his wife and Lucy would be ready when the fly came at four and after all the next act of his drama must be played out at Bamford, so the sooner he got there the better.

Charlotte read "Home Chat" assiduously during the railway journey and it was not until they were getting into their brougham at Bamford that the full force of his position was borne in upon MacStodger. The station master, porters, cabmen, and all the station hangers-on had their stare at him. As they drove past the "Live and let Live" a small crowd came to the door. Evidently the burglary had roused the neighbourhood.

To his wife Theodore bore himself with a dignified reserve, he knew that if he unbent to the smallest degree she would begin to chaff him and that he could not and would not stand. As for Charlotte she bided her time.

The butler met them at the door. "Only half the silver has gone, sir," he told him, "they must have been disturbed I think, the officer is here now, will you see him?"

His master assented and followed the butler to the room that had been first entered by the thieves. They encountered the cook on the stairs, she was weeping. She forgot her place in her joy at seeing the master back and all but embraced him.

"The murderin' villain," she sobbed, "oh we might have been slain in our beds, we might, and to think that Mr. Wopple, him as was so nice and all, but there, one can never——"

"You're a fool," said Charlotte sharply. The next moment they were face to

face with the inspector from Bamford, who had the case in hand. Behind him lurked a tall man with a face that reminded one somewhat of a doll, who had a note book in his hand and was trying all he knew to raise the clue-hunting look to his eyes. This was Billins, the village constable. He scented promotion in this case though unfortunately all the clues had been discovered by the Bamford man. Billins resented this, but at the same time stood in great awe of his superior.

"Good morning, sir," said the inspector, and "Good morning, sir," said Billins.

"Anything fresh?" asked Theodore.

"A very simple case, Mr. MacStodger," answered the inspector in an off-hand manner, "we've got all the evidence we want, Wopple's safe enough, we only want the other one and to find out where they've hidden the stuff."

"Then Wopple had some help?"

"Yes, we've made certain of that."



"Footprints," put in Billins in a tragic whisper.

"There are also two distinct thumb marks on the piece of glass taken from the window," said the inspector ignoring the constable's remark. "Neither the man nor the swag can be far off, they took some heavy things. We have a list of them."

Theodore was glad to get the officer out of the house. What was the silver to him; in any case Aunt Jemima's will had made him so wealthy that anything the thieves had taken was of little moment. No, it was not the financial loss that kept the poor man tossing to and fro that night. Each time he closed his eyes he saw in his mind the scene outside the Brighton station and the white face of Jerry. He fell off to sleep in the early morning and dreamed that he saw a dark, damp cell to the slimy wall of which was chained the unfortunate bailiff. He was eating bread and drinking water as fast

as it could be supplied to him and was visibly swelling. A warder stationed at the door was kept busy handing in huge jugs of water which Jerry drained at a single gulp one after the other. Quartern loaves seemed to fly down his throat. Outside there was the incessant rattle of baker's carts. Still Jeremiah kept shouting, "more, more." Through the bars of the cell window Agatha Blarm vainly shrieked to him to leave the bread and eat the nut she was handing through to him. Jerry laughed long and loudly and threw loaves at her. Suddenly a bell began to toll and Billins, attired in a surplice, holding a physical-culture book in one hand and a stop-watch in the other, entered the cell. Someone put a rope round Jerry's neck and said he thought a six-foot drop would be ample. At this everyone, including Jeremiah, burst into uncontrollable laughter.

Theodore leapt from his bed shrieking, he dared not sleep again.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRAGEDY.

SINCE the burglary, Charlotte had taken her breakfast with Lucy in her boudoir. They were agreed that Theodore was not fit company for anyone and did not hesitate to let him know it. It was, however, all one to poor MacStodger, his usual bright and cheery manner had given way to a dull apathy that no action of his wife's, friendly or otherwise, could dispel.

He was rather worse than usual on the morning that was to see his affinity arraigned before Sir John and his brother justices in the court house. He had debated with himself as to whether it would be wise to give a hint to Sir John on the matter but although he knew

his old friend would do all in his power, could he be brought to look upon his story in a serious mood, nevertheless he feared ridicule. Fate was, however, working for him. A startling headline in the "Bamford Observer" sent a shiver of anticipation through him, his dull eye lighted up with something of its former sparkle and closing the door to be free from intrusion he read greedily.

"THE MUSHROOMS" MYSTERY.

ESCAPE OF THE PRISONER.

News has reached the "Observer" office to the effect that Jeremiah Wopple, who is in custody in connection with the robbery at Mr. MacStodger's house has broken gaol and is still at large. A reporter who was immediately despatched to the police office was able to gather full information which will be printed in a special edition of the "Observer" and will be published at noon to-morrow. Suffice it to say that the escape was a

particularly daring one, the ruffian having attacked Warder Sampson, whose many friends will regret to hear lies in a dangerous condition at the County Hospital.

Here was news indeed, whether good or bad remained to be seen. Theodore pulled out his watch, a quarter to ten, the special edition would be out at twelve, over two hours. But why should he wait, surely he of all men had a right to know the worst or the best of the matter. Action, Action, it was what the poor man had been in need of during these dark anxious days and within half-an-hour he was seated with the inspector in the private room of the police station gleaning all the particulars. They were bad enough, poor Sampson was not expected to recover and the fact had caused the authorities to double their efforts to recapture the runaway. There would be a more serious charge than burglary against him in all probability. "We'll catch him, never fear,

Mr. MacStodger," the inspector said intending to cheer his visitor, "if Sampson dies it'll mean a twenty stretch or a dangle."

"A dangle?" queried Theodore.

"Well, I guess they'll hang the brute, I'm sure I hope so, don't you?"

Theodore groaned "Y-Yes," he said, "but perhaps they won't catch him."

"He simply can't get away, we have men watching all the roads for thirty miles round, he'll be caught, all right, that is unless he's killed himself."

"No, no, he hasn't done that," said Theodore briskly and with certainty.

"How do you know, have you seen him?"

The inspector gave MacStodger a suspicious glance and awaited his answer.

"Well, I shouldn't *think* he has, you see he's hardly that sort, no, not that sort at all, by no means, he hasn't any nerve, hasn't got the pluck of a mouse, why I remember only last week——"

Theodore would have rambled on in-

definitely had not the inspector pulled him up short.

"Nerve! well I've seen a bit of nerve in my time and if you don't call cracking a crib, downing a warder, climbing a ten foot wall, and sliding down a greenhouse nerve, I must say it's a passable imitation."

Their further conversation was checked by the ringing of the telephone bell and Inspector Jennins hurried away. Theodore wandered to the door and so down the High Street. He did not fancy the club but went into the "Angel" instead. Everybody he met had a word for him about Jerry, some were sympathetic, some were jocose. One man told him he was sorry to hear of his aunt's death. Nobody would leave him alone, comparative strangers even taking the opportunity of the late events to speak to him on the hateful topic of the burglary. At last he found a quieter spot in the billiard-room, where, as a good game was in progress, conversation

HE WAS ALMOST
A MILLIONAIRE.



was out of place. Here he sat sadly and drank whisky and soda, returning to the station at one o'clock. No news, and the special edition of the "Observer" that was being shouted about the town told him nothing that he did not already know. He spent the day in the

billiard-room, visiting the police station every two hours. The search was still without result, and at eight o'clock Theodore feeling somewhat better, but not much, took a cab home.

He shut himself up in his study and carefully revised his will, he saw the end approaching and he wished his affairs to be in order. He was almost

a millionaire now with Aunt Jemima's huge fortune added to his own considerable property and he gave a groan as he thought how it had come too late. At twelve he went to bed and at daybreak was awakened by the telephone in his study ringing furiously. He jumped into his dressing gown and hurried to the instrument.

"Hello."

"That you, sir? I'm Jennins, police station."

"Well?"

"He's found."

A groan.

"What's that, sir? speak louder."

"Where was h-h-he?"

"In the chalk pit on Casly Heath."

"Have you got him safe?"

"Quite, he's dead."

"WHAT?"

"Dead, neck broke."

To Inspector Jennin's ear the instrument seemed to explode, a purring sound followed, some one at the exchange

asked if he had finished, then there was silence.

"Guess he's fainted," said he to himself, "better send a man up. Billins must go when he comes off duty."

Half-an-hour later the inspector was startled by the door being thrown back and a little figure with a terror-stricken face leaped into the office. It was MacStodger.

"Not *dead*?" he shrieked.

"As a door-nail," said Jennins, "cheated the gallows he has with a vengeance."

"But I'm alive, ain't I? pinch me, kick me, oh perhaps it ain't true."

Fear and joy struggled for mastery on Theodore's face, he stood stock still, then swayed and fell limply into the inspector's arms.

It was a merciful dispensation of Providence that he remained unconscious for six days, and even then his memory was a full week in completely returning.

By that time Jerry was buried, Sampson was convalescent and the mystery of "The Mushrooms" had almost ceased to be a topic of conversation with the busy Bamfordians.

On a bright afternoon, Theodore at last awoke from a refreshing sleep and felt himself restored and with a full memory of all he had suffered. There was no doubt about his safety. Wopple was dead and he was alive. A great peace came over him as he gazed through the window of the Cottage Hospital ward where he had spent the time since his collapse in the police station.

Charlotte and Lucy entered on tip-toe and seeing he was awake went joyously to him, one to either side of the little white bed. They were very gentle, and Theodore felt what a fool he had been to let the words of a charlatan upset the lives, not only of himself but of his wife and daughter. He would have a reckoning with Madame Cleo before many days were over.

Lucy told him all the news. The silver had been found near the body of the bailiff. He had evidently chosen the chalk-pit as a hiding place for the treasure and in visiting it at night and not daring to take a lantern he met his death in the dangerous descent. Micky had not been found, his mother had attended church the next week in a new silk dress but would answer no questions. The search for him was still being pursued but as nearly all the property had been recovered and the prime mover in the robbery dead, public interest had waned almost to vanishing point.

Harry and Charlie looked in to take the ladies home. Theodore wanted to join them, but the doctor insisted on a day or two more where he was.

At the end of the week, however, he was well wrapped up and sent home in his brougham. Miss Blarm was dining with them and met Theodore in rather a shamefaced way. They both felt great

fools and were very very thankful that they had kept the secret. Each felt that their safety from ridicule rested with the other's silence. In fact the subject was only once referred to between them. Theodore was not quite satisfied and, talking it over with the old lady, he decided to see Madame Cleo and under threat of prosecution to wrest a confession from her. Until the matter was put beyond a shadow of doubt, he would hardly be at rest.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CONFESSION.

A GREAT disappointment was awaiting Theodore at Mills Street. For some time his knocks, growing louder and louder as his impatience increased, brought no response from the other side of the green door. Théodore grew anxious and falling back a few paces surveyed the house. It had certainly lost a great deal of its pleasant appearance, the windows were dirty and the flowers in the window boxes evidently lacked attention. A rattle of a chain at last brought Theodore up to the door



again, which was opened cautiously, still on the chain, leaving an aperture of a few inches, round which peered an evil-looking man of middle age, who regarded Theodore with a scowl.

"Wot, another of 'em are yer?"

"A n o t h e r what?" queried Theodore.

"Reporters, paper blokes, I've 'ad ten 'ere this blessed mornin', since the show upstairs 'as been shut up."

"But I——" started Theodore.

"Oh yes, I know, yer don't come over me. Wot with yer '*Daily this*' and

'*Daily that*' I'm nearly off me bloomin' 'ed, I don't know nuffink wotever about it. She's gone, went soon as she see them first bits which yer put in the paper about 'em."

It suddenly flashed across Theodore's mind that he had read of a campaign against persons of Madame Cleo's craft in the paper on his way to town. He saw he would have some difficulty in tracing this woman.

He drew a sovereign from his pocket and held it up to the man's face.

"I particularly wish to see Madame Cleo," he said, "I do not represent a paper. I have nothing whatever to do with the Press."

"Nor the perlice?" queried the man suspiciously.

"Neither, I assure you. It is merely a private matter."

"Well, sir, I can't *give* yer her address," the evil-looking man pocketed the gold coin and went on, "but I can let 'er 'ave a note if yer care to write one.

No, yer can't come in, I'm 'aving me dinner. Can't yer write it over there?" he pointed to a little tavern across the street. "Just drop it in this 'ere box wiv 'Mrs. Clo' written on it. It'll be all right, yer can take *my* word."

This was the most he could get from the man, who seemed very anxious to shut the door, so after a good lunch MacStodger penned a letter to Madame Cleo, telling her of Jerry's death and of his own sufferings. He begged from her a confession, either of her fraud or her mistake, he hinted at his influence should she ever be brought to justice. He even enclosed her a cheque for ten pounds in the hope that it might soften her and induce her to tell the truth.

The promptness of the reply pointed to the fact that the clairvoyante was not far from her old haunt, as the first post to "The Mushrooms" brought her letter. Theodore was successful in slipping it unopened between the sheets of

the "Telegraph" and at a fitting time, when alone, he read it.

"Honoured Sir," the letter ran, "It is with very mixed feelings that I answer your letter for I must own to a deception. The tragic death of my nephew also tells me to make any reparation in my power. You are surprised, but Jeremiah was my nephew, a ne'er-do-well, but hardly, I thought, as wicked as he has proved himself to be. It was while making his temporary sojourns in houses for restraint that Jeremiah picked up knowledge of families that he transferred to me. In the case of some west-end houses this plan had worked well, though, as you will understand, it is seldom that fate has played into my hands so completely as in your case. Only three days before you called on me I had had a letter from my nephew in which was the information he had ferretted out about your family, your own birth-day, etc. You will remember that you had to wait some time in my

ante-room, the three others who were apparently waiting being friends of mine, who enter the room when the visitors' bell rings. The time that passes while these others go out one by one, presumably to consult me, is in reality occupied by me in looking up Jerry's information which is kept carefully indexed. I remembered your name and during the time you spent in the waiting room concocted my plot. My one idea was to get Jerry provided for, I never for one moment had a thought of the burglary. I well knew that could I but impress upon you my infallibility the rest would be simple. It was not likely that you would let him run wild. I had no time to tell him my plan and on second thoughts it appeared better not to, he would overact his part, possibly. How my plan succeeded I now know. I am not likely to start business again, I have saved enough money to live quietly with my sister, whom I am taking from her present house at Rotherhithe to share a

little cottage and our old age in the country.

"Your relief at this confession may prompt you to even extend your forgiveness to

"Your humble servant,

"MARTHA BRIGGS."

(Madame Cleo).

Theodore slowly tore up the letter as he went to the window in answer to a salutation from Harry and Lucy, whose smiling happy faces looked in at him.

"You look quite yourself again, papa," said his daughter, "doesn't he, Harry?"

The sun that had hitherto been obscured now came from behind a cloud shining with autumnal splendour on the few late roses.

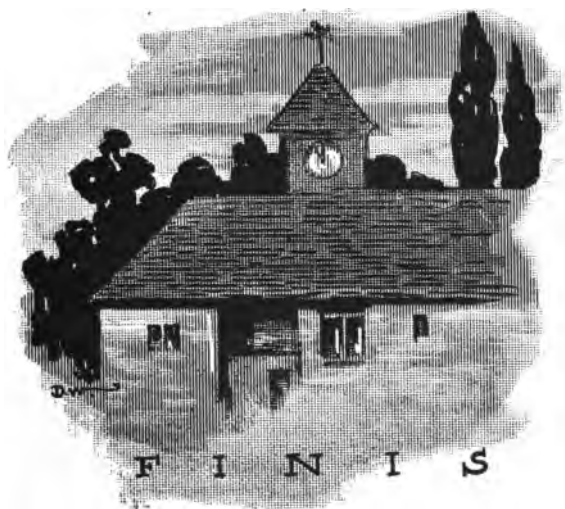
The clock over the stables struck eleven.

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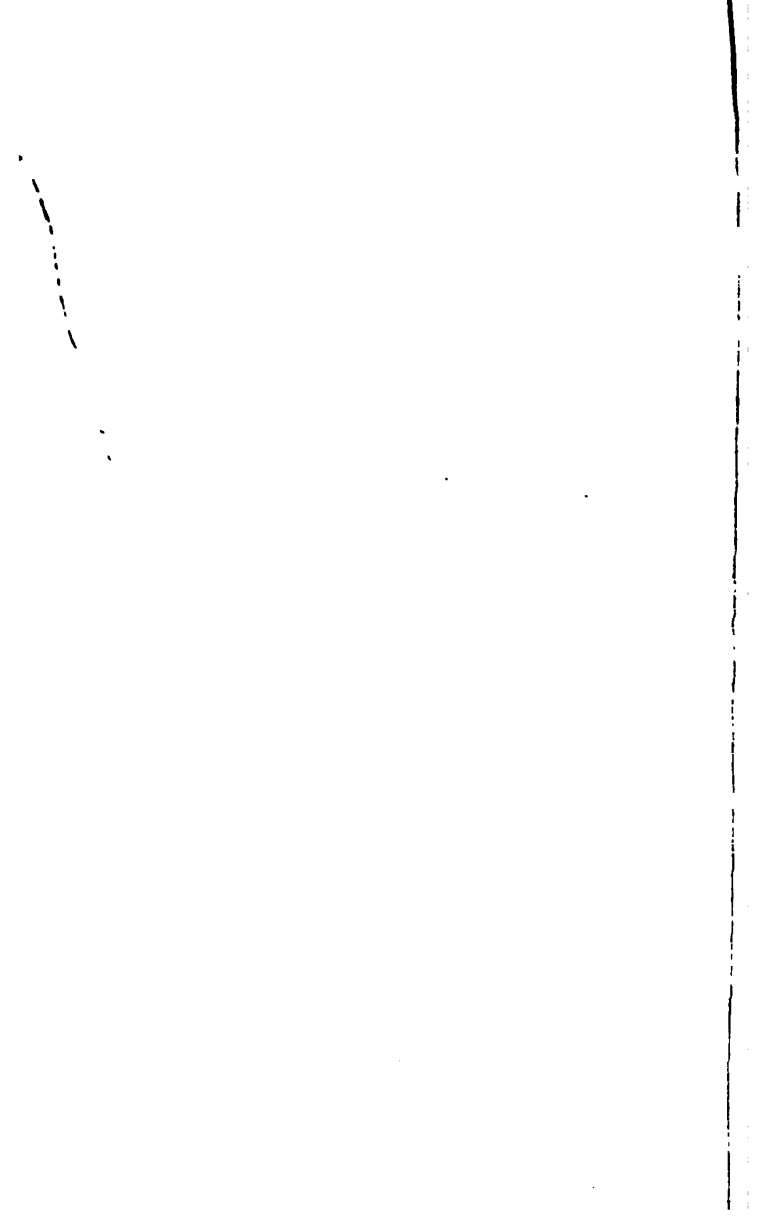
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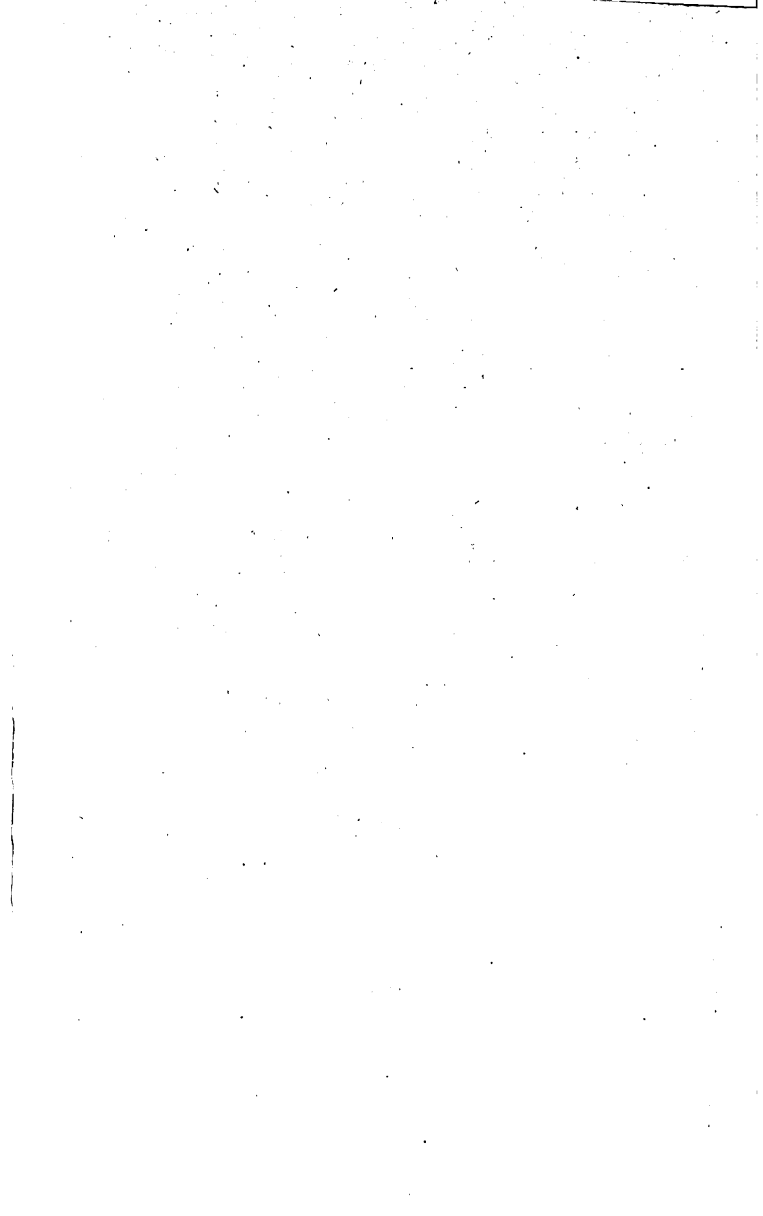
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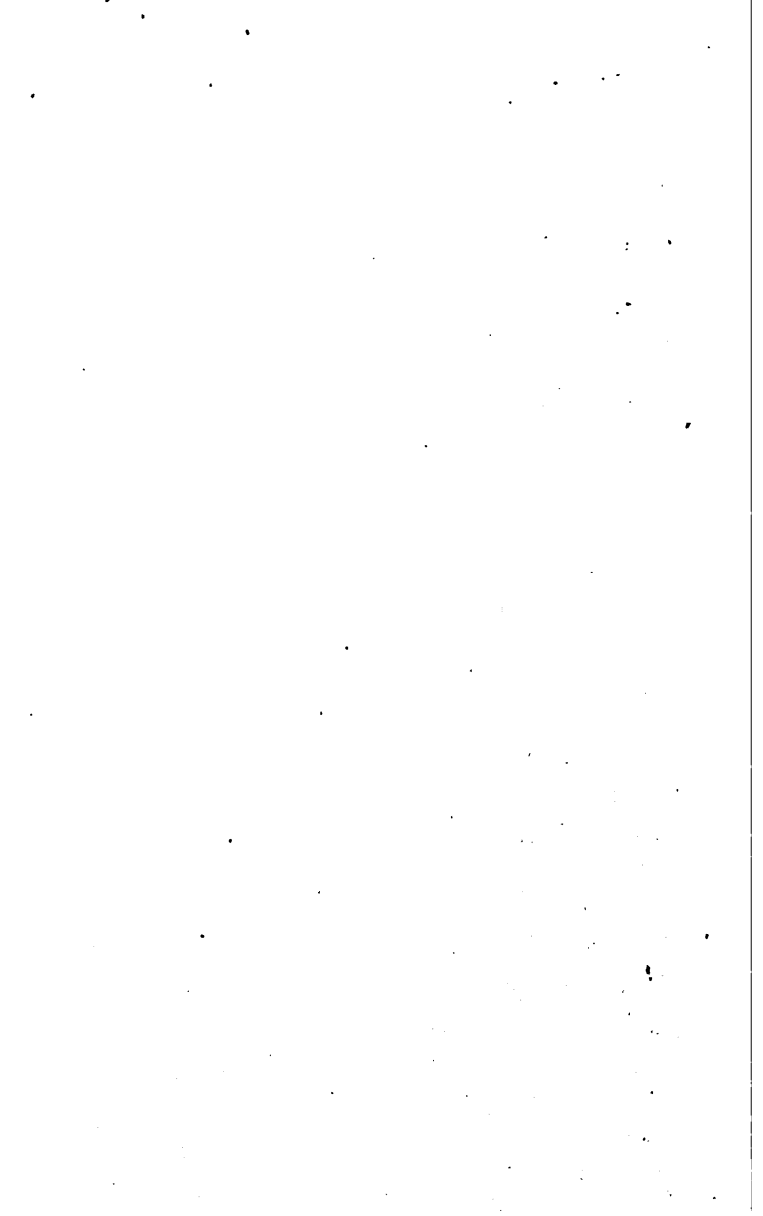
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